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# Performing Ethnographic Inquiry into America's Black Youth Culture: The Impact of Hip Hop and Rap Music on Today'S Youth Society

Rose Cummings Spikes

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PERFORMING ETHNOGRAPHIC INQUIRY INTO AMERICA'S BLACK YOUTH  
CULTURE: THE IMPACT OF HIP HOP AND RAP MUSIC ON TODAY'S YOUTH  
SOCIETY

by

ROSE CUMMINGS SPIKES

(Under the Direction of John A. Weaver)

ABSTRACT

This is an ethnographic inquiry into America's black youth culture. It is an exploration of how the "hip hop culture" influences black youth culture. Drawing on the works of Rose (1994a, 1994b), Dimitriadis (2001), and Kitwana (2002), I explored impact of the hip hop culture in the areas of fashion, language and identity through the lens of young black males. To provide relevant theories for promoting higher academic achievement in African American males, I studied the works of Gay (2000), Ladson-Billings (2006, 2003, 2001, 1999), Weaver & Daspit (2003) and Watkins (2001). Sixth grade male students in a PreK-8 school, located in Savannah, Georgia were the focus of this study. Using group discussions and interviews, I documented the time spent with the students using hip hop and rap music. Each student's view of hip hop and its significance allowed me to better understand their interest in and reverence of the rap and hip hop culture.

Much of the literature on hip hop culture deals with music, fashion, language and identity and its impact on contemporary youth culture. A limited number of educational text explored the how hip hop culture can be used to engage African American youth in culturally relevant pedagogy.

As a result of the drive for national standards in the United States today, school districts face the challenges of having all students performing at high academic levels. Superintendents, school officials and administrators, and teachers are frustrated by high stakes testing and its impact on meeting Adequately Yearly Progress (AYP). In a school district in which the academic achievement of all learners students is important, it is the intent of this study will be to promote the use of hip hop culture to engage all students in culturally relevant pedagogy.

INDEX WORDS: Hip Hop Culture, Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, Ethnography

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SOCIETY

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DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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2010

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my parents, who have always encouraged me to believe in myself.

This text is for the many students who shared their thoughts on their place in the history of hip hop and how it has shaped their language, identity and fashion, and more importantly, their academic achievement.

With admiration for someone who understood me best, I dedicate this study to my late husband, Eddie Spikes, who always encouraged me, believed in me, and loved me as I struggle to finish my doctoral studies.

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## PROLOGUE

Thinking back to the days of my youth in the 1970's and 1980's during, the music, fashion and language were hip. I heard a rapper by the name of Kurtis Blow sing with such a rhythmic sound. Many teens would break out into rap he recorded entitled "These are the Breaks." It was free of vulgar language, but full of hip rhymes and beats. I am sure most parents did not understand the excitement of what we enjoyed through our music. Surprisingly, I do not recall at anytime that parents or any adult who told us to turn down our music. We just wanted to have fun with our friends listening to the "fly" (or what we thought was fly) music.

My peers may agree the youth fashions circa 1980 were the hippest to date. To be seen in public, especially at the skating rink or at a teen party, youth must have list of fashion designers and clothes included, but not limited to Calvin Klein jeans, Jordache jeans, Gloria Vanderbilt jeans, Double belts, Jelly shoes, Converse All Stars tennis shoes, Stacy Adams shoes, Macgregor sneakers, and Nikes (before Air Jordan). I still have a pair of Jordache jeans, which were owned by my husband Eddie.

In the 1980's, to be hip your vocabulary consisted of the following terms: "YO," "What's up cuz?" "Cool," and "Sho' you right." The language was a form of a code to other youth of the times. Many of the derogatory and profane language used today in rap, addressing females were not popular at the time.

Using the "N" word in any setting would start a fistfight. It was not deemed a term of endearment. In the words of Archie and Edith Bunker, "Those were the days."

Fast Forward 30 years later...As my husband Eddie and I walked into the Macon Coliseum in northeast Georgia on a Thursday night to watch the state semi-finals high

school basketball games, I realized that I was a witness to the hip hop generation at their finest. As I gingerly walked into the aisle, I eased into a folded stadium seat. I eyed a group of young male and females scurrying around like ants running away from a mound after a downpour of rainwater. I was mesmerized by the massive groups of youth as we took our seats. From my vantage point, I saw what appeared to be a Hip Hop Award show or Vibe Music show featuring Lil' Wayne, Young Jeezy, or 50 cent (pronounced "Fiddy Cent"). The youth sported the hippest fashion from Hip Hop celebrities such as P.Diddy (Sean John), Russell Simmons (Phat Farm) and Jay Z (Roca Wear) to other fashion designs -- Baby Phat, South Pole and FUBU.

The program my husband read said Tipoff at 8:00. As the game got underway between Beach High and Redon High, the young people continue to move around the arena. During the game, the youth walked the entire time. At that moment I noticed some fashions and what must have been "must have" gear and accessories.... baggy pants and skinny jeans. Oversized tee-shirts and tight blouses. Leather and racing jackets. Braids and dreadlocks. Short cuts and long weaves. Throwback jerseys and hoodies. Sport team caps with hanging labels. iPods and MP3 players hanging from the head. Cell phones ringing with rap music ringtones.

I knew at once and for all this generation, primarily Generation Next or Gen Nexters were consumers of the latest fashion in hip hop. I was a captive audience of Generation Next. Generation Next—a group of young people aged 16 to 25 who have grown up with personal computers, cell phones and the Internet. A group of youth who came of age in the wake of September 11, 2001 and the shooting at Virginia Tech. A

youth culture that may be affectionately known as the “Look at me” generation is fascinated with the advent of Facebook, MySpace and My Yearbook.

One may speculate that the basketball game itself was just a meeting spot for Gen Nexters. The real deal was “hooking up” with their “homies,” “dogs,” or “boyz.” Most interestingly, was a group of boys (AKA “Crew”) who congregated near my seat. A few cheerleaders approached them and a conversation began. I did not have my hip hop dictionary, but I was able to understand a bit of the language. I heard “Wuz up little shorty (referring to a female)?” A few snickers and smiles from the girls, brought smiles from the guys. Another couple of males showed up and I overheard “Yo, dog! I like those Timbs (Timberland shoes)!” The security and off duty officers for the arena, approached them with, “Keep moving!” This always got the youth to scatter, reluctantly of course. As the group broke up, I believe I heard “Man, let’s bounce” and “Holla.” Oh what language, please interpret!

As I reflect on that night at the game, I realized that I became more intrigued with the hip hop culture. Throughout my career, I have worked with students who looked and acted like the youth I saw that night. Even students with diverse ethnicities and cultural backgrounds have embraced hip hop and rap culture.

As I navigate through my school each day, I am thrilled with and in awe of, this generation. Although my students are a little younger than the Generation Next, this generation has impacted the way my students think. As a result, I understand that the students also have their need to express their creativity through music, fashion and language. I want to provide an avenue in which the students may connect academics and

hip hop and rap, yet addresses societal issues while viewing hip hop and rap as culturally relevant(Ladson-Billings) while they develop as citizens of the world, as well. As an administrator of a school, it is important to me that students are engaged in curriculum that prepares them for a high tech-global society and appreciates the cultural diversity of these students. I want to encourage teachers and parents to view hip hop and rap as another tool to engage student to appreciate a school curriculum that is viable and relevant. If administrators, teachers , parents, and, other stakeholders understand the cultural phenemona of hip hop and rap and began to explore the use of hip hop and rap, and not dismiss it. I believe the students will say In the words of rapper, Kurtis Blow “These are the breaks!!!”



Estranged from African Americans, European Americans are estranged from themselves. Being repressed, unfortunately , also means being stupid, and in order to realize our national intelligence we need to remember—in social-psychoanalytic fashion—those denied and repressed elements of who we are. This means, in part, that we must incorporate African American experience throughout the school curriculum, rather than marginalize it as “black studies” (although it also necessary to institutionalize it in that form as a space for separatist , intellectually autonomous research and action -- Pinar, 1993, 69

## CHAPTER 1

### LOOKING BACK

African American culture has been enriched by the oral tradition of our ancestors. Music, dance, and oral storytelling have influenced the lives of many African American people. For centuries, slave narratives and Negro spirituals were the sounds of the African American experience. Historically, the culture of African Americans relied on family, community, church, and schools to determine the values and beliefs system. It is not uncommon to be told the history of the struggle of the African American people and that the youth must lead the way in the struggle to fight for their rights—human rights. Black youths are indoctrinated with the culture, language, and identity of their African ancestors. Kitwana (2002) contends “Black youth culture during the 1920s, the 1930s, and even the 1960s was national in scope. Yet, during each of these periods, Black youth were more likely to derive values and identity from such traditional community institutions as family, church and school” (p. 7).

As a baby boomer, I entered into the black youth culture by using hip hop culture, such as the music, language, identity, and style to promote higher student academic achievement. While I realized that the rap and hip hop culture is often presented through the media with negative images, which resulted in many individuals, such as the faith-based community, educators, and political leaders, to be dismissive of hip hop as having no benefit to our youth.

Similarly, I must admit I had misconceptions about a youth culture of people wearing baggy and sagging pants (showing their underwear) and oversized shirts, loud, explicit music filled with cusses, as negative, as well. Initially, the youth who hung their

pants and used vulgarity in public appeared rough, rowdy, and simply ominous to the average person. As I talked with others regarding my thoughts, I learned that the sagging and dragging pants originated from the prison experience since prisoners were not allowed to wear belts. As a result, their pants sagged and hung all the day which also shows the impact on our youth from those family and community members who are incarcerated within the African American community. Many of the rappers and hip hop stars wear sagging, oversized clothes sagging, which the young people emulate. At any rate, I, too, based my opinion of these students on appearances not on anything substantive.

I have always believed that confession is good for the soul. Here and now, I must confess I am fascinated by the hip hop culture, because of my connection to youth culture in the school, neighborhood, and faith-based community. If educators—administrators, teachers, counselors, and even parents (the first teachers)—had more information on hip hop culture, and its impact on youth, whether positive or negative, they would want to better develop and implement curriculum that would foster African American students academic achievement within the context of the school environment.

This study has implications for my school district and my individual school. In a district where some of the elementary schools and a significant number of middle and high school are struggling to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), the academic achievement of all students is vital to the school district. According to Giroux & Seals (1996), “public schools also have come under fire in Republican-controlled Congress. The GOP budget proposal would not only eliminate funding for President Clinton’s

Goals 2000 education program but would also reduce or eliminate federal monies for more popular programs” ( p. 83).

Regardless of limited funding or resources, in my role as an educator of today’s youth I have the responsibility of helping all students achieve and learn at high academic levels. As an African American educator, I want to use popular culture, more specifically hip hop and rap, to address the academic, social and cultural needs of African American male youth.

### High Stakes Testing and Being “Stupid”

As I enter the arena of academia, I can appreciate the frustration of superintendents, central office administrators, school administrators, and teachers who are being criticized for the myriad of problems in schools. Many students, especially students of African American (AA) descent are not making the grade academically. African American students lag behind their white counterparts in academic subjects and in high stakes testing. Academic achievement gaps have existed between African American and White students for decades. According to the report by the Education Trust on African American Achievement in America (2006), 12% of AA fourth graders reach proficient or advanced levels in reading, while 61% have not reached the basic performance level. The same proportion of AA eighth graders fall below the basic achievement level, compared to only 7% who reach the proficient level or above on National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).

This study engages Black males in culturally relevant pedagogy(Ladson-Billing,2006)) using hip hop and rap. The investigation takes place in a suburban southern elementary school, where I am employed as the vice principal with a small

population of African American students. While other groups, such as Caucasian, Latino, Asian and multiracial are represented, I have chosen to examine hip hop culture and its impact on African American male students.

This task was attained through an ethnographic inquiry method in order to capture the significance and complexities of the hip hop culture through the lenses of six black male students in the sixth grade. I reviewed several bodies of literature to support my critical race theory framework, including literature on hip hop culture, critical responsive pedagogy and social justice. Using group discussions and interviews, I documented the time spent with the students using hip hop and rap music as a backdrop to this work. Each student's view of hip hop and its significance allowed me to better understand their interest in and reverence of rap and hip hop culture.

### The "Real Deal" on No Child Left Behind

As schools become more populated with minority subgroups, the public schools standings are declining in the academic areas. In 1997, the National Task Force on Minority High Achievement, a group formed by the College Board, reported significant deficiency in the academic achievement of African American, Latinos, and Native American students. O'Connor, Horvat, & Lewis (2006) reports, "Although research shows a disparity between academic achievement between Blacks and Whites existed for decades, discussion of an "achievement gap" did not enter public discourse until the years following *Brown v. Board of Education*, when measurable strides were made in giving black students more adequate educational opportunities"( p.3). Gordon argues:

As our nation and schools become increasingly diverse, the issue of closing the achievement gap becomes more urgent. Between 1972 and 1998, the proportion of students of color in public schools increased from 22 percent to 38 percent. The enrollment rates for students of color in the West and South already constitute 47 percent and 45 percent, respectively, of the student population. Thus, in our multifaceted roles as educators, policy-makers, parents, and community members, it is important that we stimulate high levels of academic achievement for all students, particularly those who have been least well-served by our schools.

(Gordon, 2006, p. 26)

Schools which fare well do not receive any assistance with minority students who are struggling. Only schools with a large proportion of free and reduced lunch students receive any federal assistance known as Title I. Many administrators view funding based on poverty as unfair and unfortunate. Many schools where a large proportion of their families earning a little below the poverty level and there is a significant number of students qualify for free or reduced lunch do not receive any financial assistance. Meanwhile, federal funds (as well as state revenue) are being cut, yet school leaders are expected to improve student achievement and raise standardized test scores. As a result of the federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 legislation, school districts and school administrators are scrambling to meet the demands of this law. Teachers are stressed as a result of trying to accomplish the mandates of this non-funded Federal law. A state could be jeopardize Federal funding for its schools and children, if it categorically rejects the goals embodied in NCLB by refusing to implement a system of high standards, assessments, and accountability. One Georgia School District writes,

“NCLB” doesn’t penalize schools for low student achievement—it penalizes states that refuse to measure achievement, hold schools accountable, or help them improve” (SCCPSS, 2007). On the subject of NCLB, Ladson-Billing (2006) remarks, “Unfortunately these grand plans were not matched with adequate funding from the federal government” (p.3). Similarly Ladson-Billings and many school officials realize that in spirit, NCLB was implemented to ensure accountability; however, in reality, there are no funds to support the plan.

Not surprisingly, during the first term of the George W. Bush administration, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act was due for reauthorization. Instead of focusing the reauthorization solely on the compensatory aspects of Title I, the Bush White House made an omnibus act that affected all public schools. Their program, called No Child Left Behind (NCLB), required schools to test students regularly, hire what were termed “highly qualified” teachers, and use “scientifically proven” teaching methods (Ladson-Billings, 2006). In the past, states had complete autonomy in defining progress under Title I. However, many states fell down on the job. Some states set goals so modest that it would have taken more than a hundred years to make progress. In short, many states failed to measure and report the achievement of low-income and minority students. According to Lipman (2000):

Since the 1980s, education reform has moved away from a focus on equity to a focus on standards, accountability, and market mechanisms to improve public schools. The policies enacted in the 1970s—from affirmative action, to bilingual education, to Title IX (equity for girls and women)—were a response to the African American civil rights movement and social movements of other

oppressed groups in the 1960s and 1970s. To be sure, these policies fell far short of producing educational equity and social inclusion (p.100).

Moreover, most of the recent reforms include standards that regulate curriculum and pedagogy and assessments that are used to hold students and teachers accountable. When the assessments are used to determine whether students are promoted from either a particular grade or from high school, the tests become high stakes for students. High stakes testing, is designed to determine whether or not students make the grade. Unfortunately, for many students this creates increased anxiety and frustration. Moreover, teachers began focusing on the tests rather than standards, skills and strategies which leads to not meeting the diverse needs of students. Under NCLB the assessments are used to determine whether a school or district is achieving adequate yearly progress (AYP) using high stakes testing. A superintendent of a large school district in Southeast Georgia uses the mantra in relating to student achievement “teaching at high levels” and “all means all” not “all means some.” (Thomas Lockamy, 2006,) In my opinion, the superintendent recognizes the need for students to learn culturally relevant pedagogy. In essence, school leaders are held accountable for the achievement of students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, students from racial and ethnic groups, students with limited-English proficiency, and students with disabilities. In years past, school districts could determine which students were considered successful. Often times, the students who suffered the most were low-income and minority students. Presently, under NCLB, if a particular subgroup of students does not make AYP, the school does not make AYP. Therefore, schools and teachers face significant pressure to teach what will be tested.



For many students, high stakes testing, such as Georgia CRCT, creates more anxiety than success. The needs of the students may not be met because the schools are trying to make AYP. In Georgia, two standardized tests are administered to determine academic achievement. During the fall of the school year, the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) in grades three, five, and eight are administered. In early spring, a state wide writing assessment is given in the same grades. In addition, students in Grades 1-8 are administered the Georgia Criterion Reference Competency Test (GCRCT). The GCRCT is used to determine promotion for students in grades three, five, and eight. The GCRCT is written from the Georgia Performance Standards (GPS) that have replaced the Quality Core Curriculum (QCC).

Many schools are not meeting the needs of students, especially African American males. Schools need to provide a curriculum that better serves students who may view school as waste of time and boring. According to Roy (2003), "First, we need different kinds of conceptualization of schooling, an epistemological and ontological shift in order to appreciate the somewhat open, leaky, and indeterminate spaces that can better accommodate 'border' youth who cannot fit into mainstream schools" (p. 30). Gordon (2006) remarks, "The most critical problems in education that faces Black America is the problem of the gap in academic achievement known to exist between blacks and whites" (p. 26). Gordon points out gaps in achievement and Roy argues for "different kinds of conceptualization of schooling." I assert there needs to be a curriculum that meets the needs of all students. As an educator in an elementary school, I have observed the need for promoting higher achievement using culturally relevant teaching methods and strategies for all students, especially African American males. Students focus more on

topics that interest and engage them in the lessons. Tyson (2006) remarks, “From the earliest years in school, students receive messages about the impact of academic achievement. They learn that grades and standardized test scores hold meaning as indicators of ability, competence, and most critically, potential for adult success” (p.65). Unfortunately, many African American males score lower on standardized tests, which results in placement in remediation classes or recommendation for special education classes. These students do not understand the significance of academic achievement nor the correlation between academic success and “potential for adult success.”

In the primary grades, teachers engage students in learning using music, poetry, and dance. I believe older students would be more actively engaged through visual arts, movement, dance and songs. I think that the students can attain academic success using creative techniques, such as a rap and hip hop music. When the curriculum meets the needs of students, most students have the potential for achieving some level of academic success. In the school district in which I serve as a vice principal, the school district has an expectation that “all teachers will teach at high levels” and “all students will achieve at high levels.”

More importantly, while working in a school district in which “all means all,” I am interested in exploring the *significance* of hip hop in the context of academic achievement. Many times as I began to talk with the upper elementary African American male students in third through fifth grades, I realized many of them were encountering behavioral issues and academic difficulty. As I looked at these students, I noticed the student (before school district’s mandatory uniform policy) were wearing the most up-to-date “hip hop gear,” but could not get “geared up” for academics. During the

conversation, I observed that these students were very intelligent in regards to the latest hip hop gurus and or latest beats or raps. Moreover, I discovered that these students wanted to learn; however, they wanted it delivered to them in a different way. I would drop a few hip hop or artist names, just to show my limited knowledge, but I would gradually build a rapport with these students. These conversations provided a way to talk about the importance of their academics and social interactions.

Reynolds (2003) remarks:

I suppose my concern for the children in the schools who face the incredible boredom and meaninglessness of standardized and trivialized curriculum. One possibility is to have teachers and others working in the schools begin and continue to think differently about these issues from the multiple perspectives that the reconceptualized field can provide .(p. 87)

Reynolds' discussion of the "boredom and meaningless" curriculum is a valid point for today's youth culture. There seems to be a discrepancy of what teachers and administrators deem important for students and what students want to study and learn. Pressured by the need to make AYP, teachers talk about testing, testing, and more testing.

In my conversations with students, mainly the students who seem "at-risk" (a term I exclude from my vocabulary) for not making the grade, view school as boring because of testing and having to know information for testing. Those students in grades in which tests are administered for promotion, sometimes get weary of test preps. The teachers are covering the standards and want their students to do well; however, in many cases the students do not understand the significance of what the teachers are teaching. Some students think the curriculum is irrelevant and meaningless. What is an irrelevant

and meaningless curriculum? What would happen if the curriculum integrated students' interests---topics on the latest fashion in clothes and shoes, electronic devices, and newest dances and hippest music?

As a teacher and administrator for over twenty years in the district's elementary schools, I have been an observer of the youth culture, youth black culture and hip hop culture. In the urban elementary school in which I served as an administrator for nearly four years, the students often request that I attend their performances showcasing their latest hip hop moves and rap songs in the school's Dinner and Talent Show. When I watched the students perform, I knew that these students had the aptitude to do great things. Therefore, I believe the students will welcome the opportunity to learn and understand how hip hop evolved.

While I respect what hip hop and rap artists may be doing with their talent, few artists give credit to the earlier forms of music which predates and from where hip hop and rap evolved including Jazz and the Blues, which are original African American music genres. If there were a connection made perhaps hip hop and rap and its significance in the Latino and Black youth culture would be showcased to today's youth and adult. Earlier hip hop and rap was started with more positive messages for youth. Specifically, I would like to determine the use of hip hop and rap to promote positive messages to address the academic, societal and/or cultural needs of students.

The purpose of the study was to explore how of popular culture, especially hip-hop culture can be used to engage African American males in culturally relevant pedagogy. Hip- hop culture has had an impact on music, fashion, identity, and language. By using hip-hop culture, teachers can address the curricular needs of students,

particularly African American males. How do African American students understand /perceive hip hop in the context of academics? How does hip hop and rap address the societal issues of AA students? How can hip hop and rap be used in a positive way to impact the cultural needs of students, especially AA male students?

### Autobiographical *Roots*

Before Alex Haley's book *Roots* made its television mini-series debut in 1977, I had my own family tree, which was rooted and grounded in the lives of my three great grandparents (one paternal and two maternal) and four grandparents (both maternal and paternal) living in the small towns of Long and Tattnall Counties, Georgia, respectively. While I was fascinated with the movie, I became interested in my own blackness and family historical *roots*.

This research grew out of my personal experiences of growing up within a Black community with three African American brothers and subsequently, teaching African American males. Since I was the eldest of four children, I was the first in my family to attend an integrated school in a segregated rural town in Southeast Georgia for the first eight years of my life. The school was a stone's throw away from my home; however, the White students were bused into the school. My family lived in an all Black community known as the Salters Quarters on which the land was owned by the Salters Family.

Paradoxically, there were the local churches for spiritual connections and a few café or "holes in the wall" (off limits to children) for getting your "spirits" or "tea" which hosted many of the social activities for adults. The town was an agricultural one, owned by affluent Whites but the Blacks and other minority groups provided the menial labor.

While my parents did not live on a farm, my father and paternal grandfather had traditional roles as breadwinners. My father and his father worked as a turpentine and pulp woodmen. My mother and my paternal and maternal grandmothers were homemakers. My maternal great-grandparents (affectionately called “Papa” and “Granny”) owned a small business. They ran a neighborhood store connected to their home. The grands and great-grands, (or “chillins” as my great-grand parents would say) including the neighborhood children would buy candy, cookies and soda pops. Although my great-grandmother was blinded by cataracts, I would observe pull paper money or coins from her handkerchief and count out change to her customers. Amazingly, she always knew her coins by feeling the surface and the edges. I would later learn she had her paper money folded differently for each bill.

I considered myself blessed to have known my great-grandparents and grandparents. The patriarch of our family, Papa often talked about the importance of the “youngins” getting’ a good education and makin’ it in life. He raised ten children and manages to send his youngest, Eva Pearl, affectionately known to us chillins as “Auntie Peggy” to college. She became a teacher. She would later become a special education teacher and then a school administrator. In the late 1960’s, in a small Georgia town she taught primary grades to the town’s children. In my family eyes, she was to be held in high esteem. She was an educator; she was close to being a guardian angel in the black community. Since she spoke well and dressed fine, she seemed to be well respected by many in the town. She retired after 35 years of service from the school system, but continued to work as an instructor at the state prison in Tattnall County. What dedication!

As I reflect on my early education, Aunt Peggy was influential in my journey of “gettin a good education.”

### We Have Just Begun

In the early 1970s my father began seeking employment outside of this little town to take care of his family of five. Miraculously, he was hired as a truck driver for a Milwaukee –based company and he moved to Savannah, Georgia. In addition, my father was a local minister with the local church. Although my father was in the home, he traveled extensively as a truck driver and a country preacher. The family spent countless hours traveling to the most rural towns in Georgia for Sunday services or revivals. My brothers and I learned the biblical stories and hymns and would often imitate what we heard in church as a means of entertaining ourselves after long trips.

A few months later, in 1972, in the middle of the school term, after finding housing my father moved my mother, two younger brothers, and I to Savannah. Like Kunte Kinte, a character in Haley’s *Roots*, who left his homeland in African where his customs and culture ruled, became indoctrinated with the American culture. We too, were leaving behind the rural town filled with the love of family and friends to a new town with new traditions and customs. As I recall, we moved into a two story home in an all black community on the Westside of town surrounded by retirees and a few families with school-aged children. The neighborhood was zoned for businesses; therefore, the community had local stores, a firehouse, cleaners, bar-b-que pit, and a few local companies. The neighbors watched out for each other and lived as close knit friends. Although I was in elementary school, I recall the decade was plagued by desegregation laws and policies.

On the first day of school, my mother drove us to a Savannah-Chatham suburban southside elementary school. The school setting was in an all White community. On the second day of school, my brother and I were bused to school. The long bus journey seemed endless and tiresome. Much to my parents' surprise the bus ride was so long, I would complete my homework before arriving home.

Prior to moving to Savannah, I had experienced going to an integrated school; however, for my peers who were also bused into the school, the experience was very difficult. Four to five black students were placed in high academic achievement settings with no explanation as to how the students were selected. I was one of six in a group of twenty Caucasian students. It seemed any black student in the higher achieving classes, who had any intellect and spoke proper grammar were cruelly referred to by the children as "an Oreo," which meant white on the inside and black on the outside or in today's language "acting white." Even on the bus ride home, the students from other classes would begin to chant, "Oreo, o-re-o, Oreo" as a form of teasing. The chant would soon be followed by laughter and the bus driver telling the students to be quiet or suffer some form of consequence. Since I was a new student, I did not know I was being called an Oreo until one of my classmates explained this was ongoing for Black students in the 'smart classes' or students who were acting like they were white. In a study on "acting white," Tyson (2000) noted elementary school students; especially African American students, expressed very little ambivalence toward high achievement. These children understood that academic achievement mattered. It not only brought those immediate positive results (e.g. praise, honors, and rewards), it also promised positive outcomes in



the future (e.g. enrollment in a good college, employment in a good job, a nice home, or decent quality of life).

Much of the scholarly and popular discourse on Black students' relationship to school and achievement has been shaped by Fordham and Ogbu's (1986) "burden-of-acting-white" hypothesis. Tyson (2006) remarks, "The authors trace the achievement gap between black and white students to a peculiar, negative 'cultural orientation toward schooling' in the African American community –a consequence of the history of oppression and discrimination suffered at the hands of Whites in America' " (p. 58). Is this the American dream?!

Prior to desegregation the teachers primarily taught White students in this predominately white community. Fortunately, the teachers were very nurturing and caring to my peers and me. However, for one of my school-aged brothers, it was very difficult because he struggled as a student. In retrospect, I believe some black and white teachers were ill-equipped to deal with the needs of an African American male student who was labeled hyperactive. My brother struggled for years in reading, yet he could remember every lyric to any song—gospel, soul, rock and roll, rap, just to name a few. Sounds familiar.....the struggles of today's African American male students who know the words or language of the rap songs, but often do poorly in reading and other areas of academics.

During the 1970s, 1980s and even the 1990s, the school in which my oldest brother and I attended were located in the White suburban communities. However, the neighborhood also had a few successful Blacks who moved in the community. Typically,

real estate companies would make a reference to this southside school as a selling point to potential new homeowners.

In essence, any student who had high ability thrived in this school environment. O'Connor et al argue, "The persistent gap in educational outcomes between Blacks and Whites has substantial social implications. Black people's experience with poor school achievement and equally poor access to postsecondary education reduces their access to important social and economic rewards (e.g. all the familial and economic benefits of high wage jobs" (2006, p.1).

In 1994, in her book *Dreamkeepers*, Gloria Ladson- Billings' wrote "across the nation, a call in our urban centers for alternative schooling suggests that attempts to desegregate the public schools have ultimately not been beneficial to African American students" (p. 1). Like my brother during his early years as a student, many African American male students are still lagging behind. With much determination to succeed, my brother overcame his obstacles with the help of caring adults. It is with great pride and admiration that I acknowledge that my brother has had a very successful career within our city government, as well as become an entrepreneur.

During my career as a teacher, I made a goal to advocate for the students who faced difficulty in academics and socialization. I was always assigned to schools in which the majority of the teaching staff and students were white. With mixed feelings, I was about to make the biggest career change of my life.

### At the Crossroads

After obtaining my Master's Degree in Middle Grades Education in 1994, I was at the crossroad of my chosen career. I decided to leave a prestigious teaching position in another suburban Southside elementary school to work in an alternative school setting for middle and high school students. The school district named it, *Crossroads Academy*. It was a name benefiting the students being taught at this school. However, I was ill-prepared for the challenges and diverse needs of these students. On the surface, the students looked like me or more like my brothers. What I learned from these students in the alternative setting has helped me for the last fifteen years to understand how African American students, especially males, view traditional schooling. Traditional school experiences were irrelevant to the academic and socio-emotional needs of the students, *based on my professional experiences*.

Crossroads Academy was comprised of mostly African American male students ages 11-15 for the middle school. Over 90 percent of the students were African American male students who had been retained at least twice. The students were struggling academically and socially which contributed to their lackluster performances in their home schools. Underachievement and social misconduct was unacceptable behavior, according to the school district, for these students. The teachers, including myself tried to redirect the students' attitudes, academic performance, and provide them with an alternative curriculum. Researchers have also stated that some African American students are underachievers because they equate school success with being required to "act white." In other words, these students infer that they have to reject their home culture to succeed academically (Thompson, 2004). At the alternative school, the

teachers had the task of making school relevant. Many of the students were enrolled in this school because of court orders and probation requirements. The students blamed their struggles on the school. The students spoke openly about race relations among their peers. These students did not see the benefit of getting an education when life on the streets had more to offer: fast cash, flashy lifestyle, cars, and better homes.

The legacy of slavery and racism leads many African American students to believe that high academic achievement only benefit White students (Butterfield, 2006, 134). Even in the movie *Roots*, Lavar Burton's Kunta Kinte did not see the benefits of what Lou Gossett's Fiddler character was teaching him about life and fitting into the ways of the plantation life of white America. For Kunta, he was a proud African who had been taken from his native land, and he did want to embrace the American ways. Fiddler had lived long enough in America to know his place in a world where the white male was dominate and any others were subhuman. Ultimately, like Kunta and Fiddler, the African American male students felt faced racism, class-ism, and other ism as a part of their life experiences, which denied them the equal share of the America dream.

According to Fordham and Ogbu (1986), African American students under value education because they do not perceive schooling to be as relevant to Blacks as to Whites and they also believe that, unlike Whites, education does not pay off for them. Acting White is diametrically opposed to the "cool pose" coping mechanism that some African American males adopt. This pose or mask is characterized by aloofness, lack of emotion, fearlessness, detachment, power, and style. Among the positive consequences are that it serves as a protective mechanism, gives African American males a sense of pride, and

serves as a form of social competence. However, the negative consequences often surface through underachievement and behavioral problems in school.

Most commonly, hip hop culture has been known for its promotion of negative images of crime and violence that students want to emulate. Some African American male students want to be perceived as a part of a youth culture in which they are recognized for being a “thug” or “gangsta.” Why has it become socially accepted in hip hop culture to be an outlaw?

As a researcher, I am interested in using hip hop and rap to promote academic achievement, and to use hip hop and rap to address societal and cultural needs of African American male students. From this exploration, I desire to gain insight into the hip hop culture and rap that may be used to provide cultural relevance to African American males. As I recalled in the book *Roots*, through all of the cruelty of slavery Fiddler taught Kunta Kinte, later known by his slave name Toby, a *positive song* about things in nature and that went like this.... “What is do I see coming around that mountain?” And Toby/Kinta replies.... “Tree, fiddler, tree, is what I see coming around that mountain”.

Chapter Two will give a literature review of critical race theory, culturally responsive pedagogy and hip hop and rap. Critical race theory (CRT) sprang up in the mid 1970’s as means to study the relationship between race and racism in the world of academia and modern society. CRT and education raises the issue of equal education opportunities for all people regardless of race. In traditional learning environment, many students are left behind, especially AA students. Unfortunately, the African American male student face even more challenges in the educational arena. Because of this issue,

culturally responsive pedagogy addresses how to make learning experiences more relevant for all students.

Chapter Three will discuss the methodology used to conduct this study. Ethnographical inquiry will be used to study the youth culture. The researcher will study a group of male sixth graders using ethnography. The study will involve observations, interviews, surveys and focus group discussions.

Chapter Four will discuss the results of the study.

Chapter Five will summarize the results of the study.

## CHAPTER 2

### WORD UP

This dissertation explored if and how popular culture, especially hip-hop culture can be used to engage African American males in culturally relevant pedagogy. In my professional experiences, I believe hip-hop culture has had an impact on music, fashion, identity and language. By using hip-hop culture, teachers can address the societal issues and curricular needs of students, particularly African American male by incorporating music, dance, the visual arts and theater to highlight their talents.

The review of literature explored the impact of popular culture, more specifically hip hop culture on African American youth. In this chapter, I reviewed three bodies of literature: (1) critical race theory and social justice; (2) the influence of popular culture and the significance hip hop culture on youth; and (3) culturally responsive pedagogy and culturally relevant teaching African American student achievement and curricular needs.

A critical race theory framework will be used to explore the search for racial justice. The goal is to understand the issues of race and student achievement and examine the relationship between race and academic achievement.

#### Racisms, Class-isms, and Other -isms

Much of the scholarship of CRT focuses on the role of “voice” to bring additional power to legal discourse involving racial justice (Ladson-Billings, 1999, p. 15).

According to Delgado and Stefancic (2001), “The critical race theory (CRT) movement is a collection of activists and scholars interested in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power” (p. 2). The first attempt at this alternate

theoretical lens was something termed, “Critical legal studies” (CLS) which drew heavily on Gramsci’s (1971) notion of “Hegemony” to describe the continued legitimacy of oppressive structures in American society (p.8).

***History of Critical Race Theory.*** Critical Race Theory sprang up in the mid-1970s with the early work of Derrick Bell (an African American) and Alan Freeman (a white), both of whom were deeply distressed over the slow pace of racial reform in the United States (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000, p. xvi). Some scholars would argue that the Critical Race Theory as a movement developed as a result of a student protest at Harvard Law school regarding a course offering on race and law and the National Critical Legal Students on race and silence (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000). Critical race theory argues that in order to shift the reliance upon whiteness, Americans need to listen to and speak its own lived experiences, using personal voices to illustrate that not all invest in the property rights of whiteness (Knauss, p.37). Derrick Bell would argue “narratives, storytelling, parables and family histories” are methods to critically analyze the oppressed and silent voices of people of color. Having a “voice” allows the oppressed to share their lived experiences on the road to social justice.

***Race and Politics.*** Gunning remarks, “The early scholars in the CRT movement were molded by the intellectual and political ideas and actions of the Civil Rights Movement—especially the Black Power movement” (p.337). Leaders, such as Martin L. King, Jr. to Malcolm X to the Black Panther Party were active in political, educational, social and economic struggles of blacks in America. Law Professor Girardeau Spann (2000) remarks, “Minority interests in the United States have typically been advanced through the political process” (p. 29). Critical Race Theory focuses on the role of law as it relates



to race and justice. Spann continues, “The present Supreme Court has been noticeably unreceptive to legal claims asserted by racial minorities” (p.21). Since the advent of slavery, people of color have had very little equal representation or protection from the legal system. Spann points out “For the time being, at least, Supreme Court adjudication appears to offer little hope for minorities seeking to protect their legal interests from either public or private disregard” (p.22).

***Race and Education.*** The plight of African Americans has been raised as a result of the equal educational opportunity for all people regardless of race. While CRT is deeply rooted in law, it has spread to other arenas. For example, in the field of education CRT is used to address the issues of academic achievement testing, school discipline, school curriculum and history. On Brown’s (2000) discussion of African American males, he remarks: “The crisis of the African-American male was brought to the attention of mainstream America with the proposals by a few public school systems to establish African American male classrooms or academies. These proposals have raised one of the most controversial educational issues of the 1990s” (p.421). As mentioned earlier, Crossroads Academy was an example of a school designed to address the needs of African American males. I worked in one of the academies for secondary students in the early 1990’s. At the time of the school’s opening, many African American community and political leaders questioned the motives of the school board for opening such a school. As a middle grade teacher, I believe the intent of the academy was to serve the needs of each student. In reality, the students did not seem to think the school was meeting their needs. On the other hand, because of the independent technology driven coursework the high school students fare much better. A decade later, the school has

become an alternative school who taken an “alternative path” in their educational pursuits.

***Race and Social Justice.*** Tolerance for others and other culture is not enough for teaching for social justice. Cochran-Smith (2004) writes, “Part of learning to teach for social justice, then, is learning to appreciate the complexities of working with (not against) individuals, families, and communities” (pp. 74-75). Fanon (1963) argues, “Culture is becoming more and more cut off from the events of today. It finds its refuge beside a hearth that glows with passionate emotion, and from there, makes its realistic paths which are the only means by which it may be made fruitful, homogenous, and consistent” (p. 217). Warner (1993) notes, “For as we know, the history of African Americans is marked by its noble demands for political tolerance from the larger society, but also its paradoxical tendency to censure its own” (p. 230). Like many ancestors whose spirit helped them to deal with social injustices, I have had my share of awkward social issues in the South. Reynolds (2003) argues, Spirituality is a manner of dwelling in the flux. It means we dwell in the forest and live on the highways. Spirituality does not ignore the injustices of our times, including the necessity of dealing with ecological crises and disasters or issues of race, class, and gender inequality that persists” (p. 58).

To do so, teachers need to respect the cultures and cultural traditions of families; ensure that the messages about race and culture conveyed directly are consistent with those conveyed more subtly; understand issues in terms of the tensions between community values and social critique; and support (and join in) activities that strengthen rather than suggest escape from neighborhoods, communities, or cultural/racial groups (Cochran-Smith, 2004, p. 74-75).

While each culture or community may be different, teachers must learn to appreciate students who are different and incorporate difference into their lessons. As difficult as it may be, teachers who only tolerate students devalue the students. For me, teaching for social justice is when no student is made to feel like an outcast, but every student is made to feel accepted regardless of race or cultural differences. In short, every student is given an opportunity to learn at high levels where cultural differences are respected and appreciated.

### Pop Culture

Changes in American society would bring changes to the curriculum field. “The field would shift from a primary and practical interest in the development of curriculum to a theoretical and practical interest in understanding curriculum” (Pinar et al., 1995, p.187). Thus began the reconceptualization of the curriculum field. William Pinar led the reconceptualization as it challenged the likes of Ralph Tyler.

Pinar (2004) states

To educate the public suggests that we teach popular curriculum as well, not only as a pedagogical lure to engage students’ interests, but through the curriculum, to enable students to connect their lived experience with academic knowledge, to foster students’ intellectual development, and students’ capacities for critical thinking (Pinar, 2004, p. 21).

Weaver (2005) asserts: “One of the reason the conversation between cultural studies and curriculum theory has only begun is that, like most other fields within education, popular culture was ignored until 1980s” (p. 104). Susan Edgerton and Pete Appelbaum are scholars who studied cultural curriculum studies (Weaver, 2005). Popular

culture has played an influential role in the lives of Black youth. Hip-hop, a cultural movement in popular culture has been a major influence for Black youth culture. McRobbie(1999) remarks, “Cultural studies , with its early home in Birmingham, was most open to popular music initially through central role it played in the formation and identity of youth subcultures”(p. 112) .

Kitwana (2002) argues “Within the arena of popular culture, rap music more than anything else has helped shape the new Black youth culture” (p. 9). In many cases our students depend on the media, more than on textbooks or the classroom, for their understanding of existing relations of dominance and subordination in the world. We must, therefore, find some way dynamically to interrogate the current production of images in the popular culture; we must find some way critically to examine film, TV, the newspaper, and popular music in classroom (McCarthy, 1993). Giroux (1992) remarks:

While there is no simple route to incorporating the student experience or popular culture into the curriculum, especially in light of the real fear by students of having these spheres colonized by the schools, it is imperative that these issues be addressed in many ways that are self-critical of the school as they are supportive and critical of the voices and histories that students bring with them to school. (p. 17)

Curriculum planners or curriculum developers create lessons for teachers that may or may not be relevant to students. Schools may need to take note on how to integrate popular culture into the school’s curriculum and address the identity and cultural issues inherent in popular culture.

Reynolds argues

Popular culture is not only media; it is also about identity and commodity (real brand) and its connection with the schools. Thus, not only do students at primary, secondary, and postsecondary levels of education get much of their education in popular culture context but also the schools and universities in their structures and curriculum evidence the immersion into the brand-named order. ( 2004, p. 26)

As Weaver and Dasgupta note, educators dismiss popular culture as being worthless form of art and even worse critics of popular culture deem the artist as not serious or even important. Any serious inquiry of popular culture, more importantly any analysis of hip hop culture would find many artists, such as Tupac Shakur , Eazy E, and Kanye West (AKA College Dropout) whose work demonstrate their place in academia. Furthermore, to address this issue, as Weaver points out, teachers use popular culture to lure students into the curriculum. Unfortunately, many educators do not know how to gain the interest of young students through popular culture, especially rap and hip hop culture.

Dimitriadis & Carlson (2003) argue: “For those individuals who are members of identity groups that have been historically marginalized, education must be a process of learning to both affirm identity (through solidarity with others similarly disempowered and/or oppressed), and to reconstruct and represent identity in ways that challenge dominant negative representations and stereotypes” ( p.19).

Gay asserts: “Occasionally the reverse is true; some media presentations of ethnic peoples and experiences are positive and even complementary to school instruction. Either way, the images are too easily accessible and their influence too powerful for teachers to ignore how ethnic groups and issues are presented in television programming,

films, newspapers, magazines, and music videos. Students bring this information and its effects to the classroom with them. Therefore, ethnic diversity in mass media should be a part of the curriculum content of culturally responsive teaching” (2000, p. 123).

In the 1990's, a show known as Def Comedy Jam on HBO, created by hip hop media mogul, Russell Simmons, featured up and coming comics. The comedians were mostly male, with a few females. During the nineties, young Black comics did not fare well in mainstream American comedy with their brand of comedic talent. Simmons' Def Comedy provided an avenue for such comics as Martin Lawrence, Bernie Mac, Cedric the Entertainer, Chris Rock, Bell Bellamy, Joe Torre, and D.L. Hughley to showcase their talents. I watched the show because it was cool, hip and fresh which gave the young people a media outlet into popular culture. The common themes, life experiences, relationships, gender issues, and sexual orientations were topics which were engrossed in the daily lives of black popular culture. Many of the comics, such as Martin Lawrence, Chris Rock and DL Hughley have achieved great success in television and film while also gaining financially.

As a connoisseur of popular culture, I feel nostalgic about my relationship with two television shows. Happy Days and Good Times. A tale of two cultures dealing with racial differences and socio-economic status. “Happy Days” circa 1950, featured a white suburban middle class family in Milwaukee who embraced the leather jacket wearing tough guy into their family. The Henry Winkler's character, Fonzy was a pop culture icon. As a child, I was thoroughly entertained by the issues of social and family issues of the times. Another iconic show featuring Jimmie J.J. Walker was “Good Times” circa 1970s, about a black family living in a Chicago ghetto. The family embraced poverty,

other political and social issues of the decade. Both shows dealt with issues of race, class and gender with a lot of humor. “By popular culture, I refer to the historically grounded experiences and practices of oppressed women and men and the processes by which these experiences and practices come to be represented, reconstructed, and reinvented in daily life, in school, in the workplace, and in the news media” (McCarthy, 1998, p. 39).

Hip hop connects youth across socioeconomic, race and culture lines.

### Outkast and Hip Hop Culture

Some cultural/ ethnic groups have embraced hip hop and rap. Many rap stars use their music for social and political change. According to Perry, Big Boi of Outkast, on the group’s first album, gives an explication of the group’s name: “Operation under the crooked American system for too long/Outkast, pronounced outcast/adjective meaning homeless or unaccepted socially, but let’s dig deeper than that” (p. 31). Outkast, an American hip hop group from Georgia. Atlanta native Andre “Andre 3000” Benjamin and Savannah native Antwan “Big Boi” Patton are members of the duo. The group’s music style consist of Dirty South with funk, soul, pop, electronic music, rock and spoken word poetry, jazz and blues. In 2001, the rap group Outkast recorded a song “Rosa Parks”. The song goes like this...**Ah ha, hush that fuss/Everybody move to the back of the bus/Do you wanna bump and slump with us/We the type of people make the club crunk.**

Parks’ attorney Johnny Cochran filed a lawsuit because of the degrading and exploitive nature of the song. Personally, the lyrics seem to be disrespectful in nature, especially when it asks “Do you want to bump and slump with us”? However, Carlson

remarks “Michael Eric Dyson seems to believe the hip hop groups such as Outkast; see many of the same qualities that Parks had---including a commitment to the forgotten black poor and to social justice” (Carlson, 2003, p. 199).

While Rosa Parks may be an individual who stood for her rights, I do not feel she would want to bump and slump or even get *crunk* (translated to mean crazy and drunk). In spite of the derogatory remarks in the song about Rosa Parks, Outkast is one of the most successful hip-hop groups, earning over six Grammy Awards.

Long before hip hop duos, like Outkast, there was Kurtis Blow; the hip hop mania got started.

#### Hip Hop Mania

**“I said a hip, hop/The hippy, the hippy/To the hip hip hop/Uh, you don’t stop the rockin’/To the bang, bang boogie/ Say up jump the boogie/To the rhythm of the boogity beat!”**

**(Rapper’s Delight, Sugar Hill Gang, 1979)**

As a teen, I can recall how the hip hop craze was just getting started in the late 1970s. We met a friend’s house afterschool to listen to the Sugar Hill gang on the radio. When Rapper’s Delight, popular on the radio would come on the airwaves, the kids would all break out with “ I said a hip hop, the hippy the hippy, to the hip hop, uh you don’t stop” . We had a ball rapping out loud. It seems like we all knew the lyrics for this extremely lengthy song.

“Rapper’s Delight” ruptured the art form’s sense of continuity as a live practice known to its entire in group” members-largely poor, Black, and Latino youth in ghettoized urban areas like Harlem, New York. This rupture was defining one for hip hop



as it came to mark the art's entrance into the public sphere of worldwide cultural discourse, where it has remained ever since. (Dimitriadis, 2001, pp.1- 2).

From its origins, hip hop has provided Black and Latino youth a public sphere to share their daily struggles in the streets, in schools, and in society. According to hip-hop legend, it was the summer of 1979 when Sylvia Robinson's son Joey Jr., persuaded her to accompany him on a talent hunt in, of all places, a New Jersey pizzeria (Watkins, 2005, p. 10). From this venture, three guys named Henry "Big Bank Hank" Jackson, Guy O'Brien, and Michael Wright AKA Wonder Mike, formed what was later dubbed the Sugar Hill Gang recorded "Rapper's Delight" (Watkins, 2005). Hip hop as a culture indisputably emerged in the South Bronx in the late 1970's and in other parts of the northeast shortly thereafter, before branching out around the country in the early 1980's (Kitwana, p.201). As a cultural movement, scholars have noted that credit may be given to DJ Kool Herc in 1972 to establish a community of peace, love, and unity and have fun and to Afrika Bambaataa through Zulu Nation in 1974, who coined the term hip hop to describe the culture. Kurtis Blow was the first rapper to sign with a major label in 1979. In 1982, Grandmaster Flash's message "The Message", was hip hop's entrance into politics. Despite the rise to fame for hip hop and rap stars, many youth rallies and events were still held to show love, peace, and unity in the community.

Dance, music, and graffiti were equally important in helping sustain the event. Like many African music and popular dance music, early hip hop cannot be understood as aural text alone but must be approached and appreciated as a multitiered event, in particular contexts of consumption and production (Dimitriadis, 2001). To embrace hip hop culture, one has to know the four elements: graffiti, break dancing, rapping, and

DJing (Light, 1999; Dimitriadis, 2001; Kitwana, 2002). Craig Watkins writes “Whether it has been the incendiary theater of Public Enemy, the pro woman statements of Queen Latifah, or the millennial musings of Kanye West, hip hop’s oppositional ethos has led to some of the most memorable moments and images in recent America pop culture history” (p.148).

Rose ( 1994a ) writes, “Rappers, DJs , graffiti artists, and break dancers all take on hip hop names and identities that speak to their role, personal characteristics, expertise, or “claim to fame.” Many artists used names such as DJ Jazzy Jeff, DJ Kool Herc, Kool Moe Dee, Kid-N-Play, LL Cool J, Sir Mix- a- Lot, and Grandmaster Flash to establish a “claim to fame.”

Graffiti artists spray painted murals and (name) “tags” on trains, trucks, and playgrounds, claiming territories and inscribing their otherwise contained identities on public property. Early break dancers’ elaborate technologically inspired street corner dances involving head spins on concrete sidewalks made the streets theatrically friendly and served as makeshift youth centers (Rose, 1994a).

According to Rose, rappers and DJs perform collaboratively. She continues “Rappers seized and used microphones as if amplification was a life-giving source. DJs who initiated spontaneous street parties by attaching customized, makeshift turntables and speakers to street light electrical sources revised the use of central thoroughfares, made ‘open-air’ community centers in neighborhoods where there were none. Rappers and DJs disseminated their work by copying it on tape-dubbing equipment and playing it on powerful portable ‘ghetto blasters’ ” (p. 38).

Because of rap, the voices, images, style, attitude, and language of young Blacks have become central in American culture, transcending geographic, social, and economic boundaries (Kitwana, p. 196). Rap music, a part of hip hop culture is one of the most influential forms of musical expression in popular culture. Bynoe remarks: “Rap music, love it or hate it, is a direct descendant of the African oral tradition. Black folks had been rapping since the 1850’s” (p.147). Kitwana and Bynoe’s notion of the “rap music” and its place in the public sphere is startling to say the least. How did rap and hip hop become a cultural phenomenon that transcends race, class, and culture?

The silenced voices of Black youth are being heard through hip hop culture. Weaver (2005) writes, “Tricia Rose was one of the first scholars to write about the phenomenon of hip-hop and is correct in locating its rise within the context of de-industrialization and white flight from urban centers in the United States” (p. 63). Rose (1994a) contends: “ Rap went relatively unnoticed by mainstream music and popular culture industries until independent music entrepreneur, Sylvia Robinson released ‘Rapper’s Delight’ in 1979” (p. 3).

Hip hop culture has transcended race and class. Hip hop encompasses the culture of African American, Latinos, Native Americans, and Whites on the West and East Coast. Youth of all cultures have begun to embrace rap and hip hop culture. The commercialism of hip hop has made it accessible for Black youth, White youth, Asian, Latino youth, just to name a few. Rap and hip hop via the mass media has been made popular by youth culture.

### And the Winners Are...

Youth culture has made hip hop and rap a commodity like no other music for corporate America. Dimitriadis (2001) argues, “Hip hop culture originated during the mid-seventies as integrated series of live community-based projects” (p.1). Youth, especially, African American youth seek cultural identity through their clothing, music, and language. In the process, hip hop has had an economic impact on the film and music industries, the fashion world, and the mass media.

Many of the films released in recent years have had hip hop and /or rap stars as their top billings. Will Smith and Beyonce lead the pack of hip hop artist using their talent as actors. Queen Latifah, Ludacris, Ice Cube, LL Cool J and T.I. round out the rappers who are skilled in music and acting. Beyonce’s nomination for best actress for *Dream Girls* and T.I. nomination for Best Actor for *ATL* demonstrates that hip hop stars have shown Hollywood they have a little star power for the big screen.

Dimitriadis & Carlson (2003) contends, “At its best, hip-hop culture has been deeply subversive of established racial representation and categories, as witnessed by the growing sense of collective identity among hip-hop youth of all racial and cultural background” (p. 21). Black youth culture is more than music, fashion, style, and language within the context of black culture as we move into the “Dawn of the Millennium” (Kitwana, 2002). In essence, hip hop is more than just music and rapping, it considers the forms of DJing, MCing, dance, visual arts, fashion, language and entrepreneurship.

Youth of today are inundated with commercialism of hip hop via television, magazines, and movies, just to name a few. Some of the most popular hip hop and rap stars are advertising products from aspirin to birth control, fast food to fast cars, make up

products to Pepsi products and many more. The media industry knows how their images of what is hip and cool influence the youth taste in fashion, music and language.

Kitwana (2002) writes:

“Today, more and more Black youth are turning to rap music, music videos, designer clothing, popular Black films, and television programs for values and identity. One can find the faces, bodies, attitudes, and language of Black youth attached to slick advertisements that sell what have become global products, whether it’s Coca-Cola and Pepsi, Reebok and Nike sneakers, films such as *Love Jones* and *Set It Off*, or popular rap artists like Missy Elliot and Busta Rhymes” ( p.9).

Gay’s discussion of media as culturally relevant curriculum explains: “Mass media are powerful sources of curriculum content about ethnic and cultural diversity. Frequently, the images and information they convey are contradictory to what is desirable and need to be corrected or countered by classroom instruction” (p. 123).

According to Daspit (2004), “In a free enterprise society, rap is a weapon of choice, appropriately increasingly decentralized technological innovative to generate a new techno culture” (p. 233). *Back in the Day*, rap music was played on the streets of the South Bronx. Parties were given with albums being scratched while showcasing the talents of MCs, DJs and break dancers. Production of albums and LPs took time. Since World War II, the United States has evolved to computer technology, to the personal computer, and now digital technology. Unfortunately, some African Americans have been shut out of the wave of technological advances. As Daspit notes rap has become more technological creating a “new techno culture” (p.233). Fast forward twenty years

later, the merging of technology and music has made it possible for anyone to access music (e.g. compact discs and videos). As more White kids purchase rap CDs, significantly more of the Black kids download or bootleg their music....”a new techno culture”.

Boyz N’ the Hood

**‘Cause boyz in the hood are always hard**

**Come talkin’ that trash and we’ll pull your card**

**Knowin’ nothin’ in life but to be legit**

**Don’t quote me boy, ‘cause I ain’t said s\_\_\_\_\_’**

**(Eazy-E, 1986)**

Rest in Peace (RIP) is a sign for the ‘boys in the hood’. The list of notable rap stars, Eazy E, Tupac Shakur, Christopher “Biggie Smalls” Wallace, and Jason “Jam Master Jay” Mizell. Except for Eazy E, all of these rappers met with a violent death at the hands of someone who wanted them dead. Harris, writes about Eazy E, “A middle class kid from Compton who got caught up in drug dealing and petty crimes. Eazy went legit by investing his money in his own label, Ruthless Records. With his distinctive, high – pitched whine, Eazy E coined the term “Boyz-N-the Hood and ushered in the gangsta era” (p. 149). Although the Boyz were known for their thuggish ways, it is noted that their early years were thugless. For example, Tupac’s mother was a member of the Black Panther Party, Biggie was born to Jamaican parents, and Jam Master Jay grew up playing drums and singing in the church choir before joining the rap group, Run DMC.

In the 1980s, Ice-T, Ice Cube, Dr. Dre, Snoop Dogg, Tupac Shakur, and Marion “Suge” Knight made their mark on hip hop culture with their gangsta rap and

rhymes, thug-life personas and funky beats and melodies. While these West Coast hip hop artists and rappers were experiencing commercial success, their West Coast style was being heralded as negatively impacting American youth (Watkins, 2005). Watkins remarks “though often blamed for sullyng youth values and promoting antisocial behavior, hip hop remains a fountain of inspiration and hope, a prominent vehicle used by young people to find their voice and place in the world” (p.164).

Squash the Beef: Dis/connection of West Coast and East Coast

**“Me Against the World”**

**With all this extra stressin**

**The question I wonder is after death**

**After my last breath**

**When will I finally get to rest?**

**(Tupac Shakur)**

In the 1990s, the youth of the times mourned the silencing of voices of two talented and gifted hip hop artists. Tupac “Pac” Shakur and Christopher “Biggie Smalls” Wallace AKA Notorious B.I.G. stunned the world, especially the hip hop world, when they were violently killed during the prime of their careers. The two were homies, or ‘boyz in the hood’ ,Tupac and Biggie represented the West Coast and East Coast, respectively. Perry (2004) notes, “One has to wonder why such powerful media – generated geographical affinities took hold among a widespread hip hop audience” (p. 21). East coast (New York) and West coast (Los Angeles) had a serious conflict (also known as a beef). I was a fan of Tupac or Pac’s films and some of his music. I never

liked the sounds of Biggie Smalls because of the misogynistic videos. However, I realized early on that these former friends had a feud that impacted their lives forever.

Kitwana (2002) remarks:

The conflict, which in print often centered on rap labels Death Row and Bad Boy, climaxed with the gangland-style murders of Tupac Shakur in 1996 and Biggie Smalls in 1997. In the wake of their deaths, many rappers participated in efforts to end the seemingly out-of-control antagonisms. (p. 208-209)

The deaths of Biggie and Tupac shook the hip hop world leading to more collaboration between artists of various regions -- West, East, Midwest, and Southeast (Perry, 2004). Perry remarks, “Hip hop survived that tragic moment and continued to grow economically without conflicts as its central theme, hence the MTV declaration of 1998 as the ‘Year of Hip Hop’” (p. 24). On a side note, Tupac’s albums have been continuously released since his death.

Rap music was more enterprising on the East and West coasts than in the deep South or Midwest. More recently, talented hip hop and rap stars have emerged from the southern states. In recent years Atlanta, Georgia has hailed the “prophets of the hood” or “one who tells the truth about the hood.” The Atlantans hip hop artists include T.I., Cash Money Millionaires, Master P, and 504 Boys. These prophet raps about life on the streets using their own style— it’s neither East Coast (Biggie style) nor West Coast (Tupac). These prophets just rap *dirty south style*.



### Rapping in the Dirty South

**“Not a teacher, or a preacher or electrician/A fighter or a writer or a politician/Kurtis blow is competition. Now throw your hands in the air and wave ‘em like you don’t care” (Kurtis Blow, 1979).**

Hip hop and rap known only on the East Coast and later the West Coast has been a way of life for African American, Latinos, Native Americans, and Whites. Many of the hip hop and rap stars from the ATL or A town (as my husband would say) are bringing a new dimension to hip hop and rap. Most of the new dances are coming out of the south. Bad Boy South’s newest song with Hollywood Celebrity Tom Cruise “It is Going Down” showcases a new dance move. Other rappers from the south such as Lil Jon, Young Jeezy and Lil Wayne & Baby are popular with youth of the new millennium. In the April 2007 issue of The Source, MC turned radio personality Monie Love remarks sparked controversy about hip hop being dead. During a BET’s inaugural Hip Hop Music Awards last year, Ludacris swaggered across the stage in a tee-sheet with the words “HIP-HOP AIN’T DEAD....IT LIVES DOWN SOUTH.”

Raymond Usher or just Usher, out of Atlanta or the ATL has been making music for decades. He has transformed star power by helping people, especially children. In an interview with media mogul, Cathy Hughes of TV One, Usher shared how he opened a home for needy children. He discusses his climb to success by disclosing how he stayed with Sean “P.Diddy” Combs to learn all the dimensions of the music industry. He has been a trendsetter not only in his musical ability, but also in his fashion sense. Unlike most hip hop stars, who wear baggy clothes, Usher wears clothing that suit the occasion. A few years ago, he set the standard by wearing a Versace suit instead of the hip hop

gear. Usher's southern roots have opened the door for other southern rap stars. I found Usher's climb to the top extraordinary. He is one of the top grossing hip hop entertainers of the decade. He is young, gifted, and Black. He will join the ranks of P. Diddy's (Sean John), Jay Z (Roca Wear) and Russell Simmons (Phat Farm), who are music moguls who have fashion sense, as well as music enterprises.

Rose (1994b) argues, "Hip hop artists use style as a form of identity formation that plays on class distinctions and hierarchies by using commodities to claim the cultural terrain. Clothing and consumption rituals testify to the power of consumption as a means of cultural expression" (p. 36). Historically, African Americans spend more money on clothes, jewelry, and cars. In the '60s, and '70s with such musicians and performers like The Supremes, The Temptations, The Four Tops, and The O'Jays, fashion was in. In the 1980s, hip hop artists such as Big Daddy Kane wore suits, fur coats and pointy dress shoes; and a group the Native Tongues wore fashions from Ralph Lauren, Tommy Hilfiger, Nautica, and even DKNY, just to name a few. While such items are depreciable, African Americans want to look like they have the money (rappers jargon-- it's all about the Benjamins). For African American youth, it is all about the bling-bling. Fashion designing is a billion dollar industry. Rose continues "Hip hop styles forges local identities for teenagers who understand their limited access to traditional avenues of social status attainment" (p. 38). In the 1990s and most recently, West Coast rappers paid homage to gangster from the 1930s and 1940s by wearing double-breasted suits, silk shirts and bowler hats from the styles of Italian designers, such as Armani, Versace, Dolce & Gabbana. Similarly, the East Coast living up to the style of "Ghetto Fabulous" sported in addition to Versace, Armani, Dolce & Gabbana also wore Prada and Fendi.

The urban wear market has **exploded** into a multi-million dollar business. As a result of the interest in urban gear, many companies were launched, FUBU (For Us by Us), Ekco Unlimited, Boss Jeans and Walker Wear. When the fashion industry and music merged, many artists such as Naughty by Nature launched Naughty Gear, Sean “Puffy Daddy” Combs started Sean Jean; and Russell Simmons created Phat Farm. Today, youth from the East, West and South are wearing urban wear from the fashion lines of Sean John, Roca Wear, Phat Farm, Baby Phat (for females), Dirty South, and South Pole (Georgians) to show their sense of style and create their own identities with a particular artist.

Kitwana notes in the book, *The Hip Hop Generation*, “Rappers’ access to global media and their use of popular culture to articulate many aspects of this national identity renders rap music central to any discussion of the new black youth culture” (p. 11). The once silenced voices of Black youth especially in the south are being heard through hip hop culture. Perhaps hip hop can spark an interest in educating our youth.

#### The Queen and the Prince: Hip Hop Royalty

**Influential with wealthy men all over the country; consulted in matters concerning race; a leader of his people; the possessor of not one, but two cadillacs, a good salary and a soft, good-looking and creamy complexioned wife (Ellison, 1995, p. 101).**

While many hip hop and rap stars primarily focus on music, many artists, such as Queen Latifah, LL Cool J, and Will Smith have demonstrated extraordinary skill in other areas of entertainment. Marks (2002) remarks, “Film and video, as industrial media, have a particular media. Because their techniques are shared with movies and

television, artists in these media are more pressured (than painters, for example) at every step of the production process to consider their relationship to mass culture” (p. 198).

In the 1980’s a new rapping duo from Philadelphia, with D.J. Jazzy Jeff and the Fresh Prince (AKA Will Smith) hit the scene with a clean rap called “Parents Just Don’t Understand”. Soon these young rap stars crossed over to situation comedy known as “The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air” produced by music mogul, Quincy Jones. The pilot aired showing a good kid from West Philadelphia who made a few wrong choices. In later episodes, Jazzy Jeff appeared as Will Smith’s friend Jazz, whose love interest was the Fresh Prince’s cousin Hilary portrayed by actress Kathryn Parsons was not reciprocated. Will Smith begin each week with his rap “born and raised in West Philly all of my days”. Although Philly music scene is from an “east coast” flavor, Philadelphia artists are also have an eclectic feel influenced by Afro-centrism, Black Muslim, Christian and Black Jewish congregations (Gordon, 2005).

The Fresh Prince was very entertaining, and is still shown in syndication on cable networks. In the show, the Fresh Prince, known as Will, was sent to live with his aunt and her affluent family. His single African American mother wanted to give him a better chance. He was mislabeled as an at-risk kid. Dimitriadis (2003) argues “these notions of ‘at-risk’ youth typically put social issues in the background in favor of psychological ones—have proven itself to be particularly ill-equipped to deal with the lives, experiences and needs of disenfranchised, minority youth” (p.8). Although, I do not use the term at-risk, I believe any kid can become at-risk when....a parent dies, a parent is deployed, a parent becomes incarcerated, a parent becomes ill, and parents become divorced. Smith’s character brought in a sense of humor about the life styles of the wealthy using hip hop

and rap. Hip Hop Culture had broken into television. Soon this rap star, turned television icon, made the transformation into a mega star integrating hip hop into such movies, *Bad Boys I and II*, *Men in Black I and II* and *Wild, Wild West*, just to name a few. His films and videos sprinkled with his rap music and dance moves made Will Smith a household name. In more recent years, he has made biopic films, such as *Ali* and *Pursuit of Happyness* that displayed his range as a movie star. Most recently, *All of Us*, a situation comedy produced by Smith and his wife, Jada Pinkett Smith, loosely based on their lives has shown Smith's aptitude and ambition for work behind the camera. This sitcom about a divorcee, his son, ex-wife and fiancée has just enough of comedy and hip hop flavor to keep my interest.

Ironically, Dana "Queen Latifah" Owens, the queen of rap made her television debut on *The Fresh Prince*. A few years later, she starred in her own popular sitcom entitled *Living Single*. This all Black cast followed the lives six friends who were young, single black professionals living in the same apartment building. Sounds almost like a Black version of *Friends*. Like Smith, she crossed over from rap to television to the silver screen. Although Queen Latifah co-starred with Steve Martin in the comedy *Bringing Down the House*, she brought down the house with her stellar performance in *Chicago*. In her earlier work, rap star Queen Latifah starred in a female gangster ( or more politically correct gangsta) film entitled *Set it Off* with Vivica Fox, Kimberly Elise and Jada Pinkett, AKA Mrs. Will Smith. The film depicted life in the hood for these African American women. The male characters were minor, yet significant, in that they were very dominant in relationship with the young women. Unfortunately, the critics questioned Queen Latifah's portrayal of a lesbian in *Set It Off* as art imitating life. In her

book, *Ladies First*, Queen Latifah writes “Lesbian. That seems to follow me lately. I’m not afraid to do roles like Cleo, the hard core, from –the-hood, down-and-down dyke in *Set It Off*. I worked that role and I played her to a T. It was one of my most challenging parts. I am more proud of that performance than any other” (p. 123). In my opinion, her co-stars had proven their acting abilities in other theatrical works; however, Queen Latifah’s portrayal of a lesbian turned gangsta was truly remarkable. *This Clairol model proved she knows Gangsta Style*.

Gangstas or Wankstas

**I got into this hip-hop game.**

**Just to try to get a girl and get some light-weight fame.**

**There’s never been no cash made in it-**

**So who thought you could get paid with it?**

**(Ice- T, Rap Games Hijacked)**

White musician have been inspired by Black artists for decades. Pat Boone and Elvis Presley’s music were influenced by black musicians. In recent years, the film industry has made movies that showcase the talents of Marshall “Eminem” Mathers, a white male rap star AKA Slimy Shady. In *8 Mile*, biopic sketch of lived experiences. “That white boy can rap” is the response by some students and other hip hop and rap stars. As with some rappers, Eminem has had his brush with the law. Dimitriadis argues, “The gangster narrative became an intrinsic part of the art this time, engendering an entire musical genre. Its wild financial success has helped to shape the contours of rap’s present landscape, the “language” through which rappers articulate their raps” (p.30).

In its infancy, hip-hop music was about social issues of poverty and police brutality, guns and violence, sex and partying, from the voice of black men. The gangsta rap narrative struck a chord in America popular culture, most especially with solvent young white teens (Dimitriadis, 2001, 29). In *Critical Race Theory*, Espinoza & Harris (2000) note: “America is distinctively African not just by way of contrast, but also by active incorporation. It has often been noted that the profitability of rap music, including hard-core ‘gangsta rap’, depends on its appeal not just to urban black kids, but to suburban white kids’. (p. 441). White kids are some of the hippest kids to date. White privilege and access to the expensive materials of hip hop stars has opened to White youth. Dimitriadis remarks: “Part of the gangsta’s mass appeal is through its narrative. The violent outlaw, living his life outside of dominate cultural constraints, solving problems through brute power and domination is character type with roots deep in popular American lore” (p. 29). Dimitriadis continues, “It is thus not surprising that the black gun-toting gangster has had such limitless appeal for so many young males, both black and white. The “gangsta” is a romantic figure, a readymade tool for teen rebellion” (p. 29).

Rappers write about their lived experiences. Many rappers have not lived as gangsters and would be classed as “wankstas” another word for “wanted to be gangsters.” Wankstas portray their lives as living in the hood, but have middle class upbringing and/or college educated. White kids and other non-black groups are seeking opportunities to experience the music that give hood life credence. Espinoza & Harris (2000) remark, “Suburban white kids seeking validation through identification with black culture even has a nickname: ‘wiggers’” (p. 441). Life in the Hood. Life on the streets. In *This Bridge*

*We Call Home*, Morris writes, “Writing detached from lived experiences is flat meaningless dull, lifeless” (p. 141). For many of hip hop generation writing about life is meaningless without their hip-hop and rap music. For many of these youth, making the band is essential for survival in the Hood.

All About the Benjamins

**Now...what y’all wanna do? Wanna be ballers? Shot callers?**

**Brawlers—who be dippin in the Benz wit the spoilers.**

**On the low from the jake in the Taurus**

**Tryin to get my hands on some grants like Horace**

**(P. Diddy, It’s All About the Benjamins, )**

After teaching for about ten years, I noticed the career choice of being an astronaut, teacher, policeman, or fireman transformed into students wanting to become professional football players or basketball players or “ballers”. In the last five years, students want more lucrative careers such as hip hop stars and singers, most specifically rappers. Move over “American Idol” in marches “Making the Band”, a show for any inspiring young person, trying to convince P. Diddy that he or she has what it takes to become a recording artist. In some cases, being professional athletes were taking a backseat to being a rap star. On rare occasions, professional ballers delve into the world of hip hop and rap music. Music mogul and fashion entrepreneur, Sean “Puffy Daddy” or “P. Diddy” Coombs had a show in 2005. Joseph “DJ Run” Simmons of the infamous Run DMC, brother of hip hop mogul Russell Simmons, has a show entitled *Run’s House*, a reality television show. So many reality shows have launched so many shows that even



hip hop stars are getting into the act. Snoop Dogg, and even former female rappers, Salt –N- Pepa has a reality show. Kitwana argues, “It is nearly impossible to find a kid on the block who doesn’t think he can be the next Puff Daddy or Master P, Chris Webber or Tiger Woods” (p.47). In the summer of 2005, an independent film, *Hustle and Flow*, starring Terrence Howard as a small time drug dealer/pimp was trying to make it big with his beats. The soundtrack “It is “Hard out Here for a Pimp” won an Oscar. Most recently, the wife of Lil Wayne and the wife of Tip “T.I.” Harris have teamed up to launched their own realty show called “Tiny and Toya” on Black Entertainment Television (BET). Kitwana (2002) remarks:

Rappers from working-poor background often work long hours in recording studios, giving concerts, and making music videos, and so on. Aspiring and self-published rappers selling their CD’s in local and regional markets do the same. With rap music as a concrete and legitimate employment option, they have something to believe in and are working in an area where they receive a sense of personal worth and satisfaction. (p. 47)

Kitwana’s point is well taken on youth are rapping, making their own CD’s and selling them (many times in the front of established places of business—Kroger’s, local businesses, such African American owned barbershops and beauty salons, gas stations). Is this entrepreneurship? How does this relate to culturally relevant teaching? Can teachers of aspiring African American rappers use the rap music and hip hop culture as culturally responsive pedagogy?

### The Mis-Education of Generation Next

**Culturally responsive teaching can be defined as using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them”( Gay, 2004, p. 29).**

Nationally, school districts have been criticized for the decline in student achievement. Federally funded projects and programs are being cut from the budget; however, administrators and teachers are expected to increase student achievement and improve test scores. Thompson (2004) argues “A culturally responsive education can increase the likelihood of students receiving an education that empowers them to improve society. Instead of merely teaching students to memorize facts and figures in order to pass tests, a culturally relevant education can give them knowledge that permits them to think critically and become aware of options that are available to them” ( p. 208). In a district where a significant number of elementary, middle and high school are struggling to maintain adequate yearly progress (AYP), the achievement of all students is vital to the school district. According to Giroux & Seals (1996), public schools also have come under fire in Republican-controlled Congress. The GOP budget proposal would not only eliminate funding for President Clinton’s Goals 2000 education program but would also reduce or eliminate federal monies for more popular programs” ( p. 83). As a teacher and school administrator, it is my responsibility to promote high achievement in all children.

My fascination with hip hop has grown since my years as working as a fifth grade teacher in a school with a predominately Black students and alternative education

programs. In most cases, the students were doing poorly academically; however, the students were aware of hip hop and rap artists and music. It was sheer delight to know they had memorized the most popular tune, yet they could not remember a social studies lesson on the revolutionary war or a science lesson about the life cycle of a frog. These same students did not want to recite poetry, but who recite the lyrics of a popular rap and not realize that rap is poetry!

As an African American educator, I want to use popular culture, especially hip hop culture to promote higher academic achievement among African American youth. Popular culture has played a significant role in the lives of Black youth. Hip-hop, a cultural movement in popular culture has been a major influence for Black youth culture. Kitwana (2002) argues, As many hip-hop generation-ers struggle to make a living in today's world, they support any changes at the elementary and secondary levels (public and private) that will prepare young blacks for employment options in a high-tech global economy (p.178). Kitwana's assertion that hip hop culture supports public and private education is admirable; however, I think more is needed. Gordon remarks

Education starts at home, in neighborhoods, and in communities. Reading to children, creating time and space for homework, and demonstrating—through words and deeds—that education is important are the key first building blocks for high educational achievement. While schools are responsible for what children are taught, reinforcement at home is essential. As members of the black community, we must take responsibility for educating all our children—whether ours by birth or otherwise—to uplift our people as a whole (p. 25).

The African proverb “It takes a village to raise a child” comes to mind as I reflect back to the time when I was a child. I think about how the neighborhood and community, especially Black community took an interest in the well being of children. As I recall there were clubs for the boys and scouting for both boys and girls in my community. The community center was another resource for help with homework and special projects. It seems parents were adamant about their children taking advantage of these educational opportunities. I agree with Gordon that education begins at home, in the neighborhood, and in the community; however, in many cases educating children is the responsibility of the school with little or no support from home. In short, because of the lack of support in many homes, our schools and community need to form a partnership in educating today’s youth.

Kitwana argues,” Hip hop generation-ers welcome the elimination of disparities in educational attainment rates (at the high school, college, and postgraduate level) including disparities in access to competent teachers and administrators, books, computers, adequate facilities and programs, the Internet, and internships” (p. 178-179). Research on the educational achievement outcomes and experiences of Black youth must necessarily attend to race. Gay’s notion of culturally relevant teaching and Ladson-Billings’ notion of culturally responsive teaching signifies equity pedagogy. Banks (2006) affirms equity pedagogy exists when teachers modify their teaching in ways that will facilitate the academic achievement of students from diverse groups. As student diversity in schools becomes the norm, not the exception, teachers, administrators, and the students are looking for strategies to successfully negotiate these changes. Teacher education programs are looking for ways to sensitize and enable prospective teachers to

understand diversity and to develop an equity-oriented pedagogy (Darling- Hammond, 2002).

Cochran-Smith (2004) notes, “Especially in urban schools, classrooms increasingly contain widely diverse student population and /or large numbers of students whose cultural backgrounds are different from the teacher’s. In each case, it is important to develop social participation structures and narrative and questioning styles that are culturally and linguistically congruent with those of the students” (p. 69). Specifically, culturally relevant teaching is a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes. These cultural referents are not merely vehicles for bridging or explaining the dominant culture; they are aspects of the curriculum in their own right (Ladson-Billings, 1994). With more of our school districts serving more minorities, especially Black and Latino student population, it is imperative that all teachers implore culturally relevant teaching to meet the educational, cultural, and social needs of students. I assert that popular culture, particular hip hop culture, is now the dominant culture of our youth and it will behoove educators to incorporate this “culture” into their teaching. This is just a thought.

In culturally responsive teaching: teaching, research, and practice, Gay describe how the traditional educational system promotes achievement for White middle –class students by building on the positive aspects of European culture. Thompson notes, “However, the same system has promoted underachievement for many students of color by ignoring the strengths of their culture” (p. 16).

With the emphasizes on curriculum goals, standards, and standardized tests, the hip hop culture may be the tool to use to address the curricular needs and promote the academic achievement of diverse students, especially African American students.

## CHAPTER 3

### A TALE OF “TWO CULTURES”

Hesse Elementary School had a newly appointed principal beginning his second year at the helm as well as being known as a school with a great reputation. Even more challenging was the school was asked to provide another option for middle school students, adding sixth grade. A few days after meeting with the principal, he called to tell me, “We’re going to be offering sixth grade.” A Kool-aid smile appeared on my face as he shared with me what the district wanted to do. With my middle grade experience and training, I found myself in the best of both worlds—working with both elementary and middle school students. More importantly, there was an overwhelming mixed response from parents. Many were enthusiastic about letting their babies remain in a school they had grown to adore. Others made plans for the transition into middle school sending their children to either traditional middle schools, or to middle schools with specialty programs or private schools.

Initially, when I walked into my new assignment, assistant principal of Hesse Elementary School, I was bursting with mixed emotions. Here I was leaving a school in which I had worked for four years. Certainly, I knew the culture and climate of that school. Furthermore, I was ready to conduct my research with the students with whom I had built my rapport and shared mutual respect. Now, I was at a new school and I had to learn the culture (the way things were done). I had heard how wonderful the school was ,but I pondered the following: *How do we do things around here? What is this going to be like? Will I be allowed to do my research?*

The first thing I decided to do was to take a tour of the school. As I walked among the classrooms, I observed that there were very few African American (AA) male students. Initially, I was going to work with AA males in fifth grade at my previous school, but that had been changed with my reassignment to Hesse. On the other hand, I was elated to know that I had an opportunity to work with middle grade students.

One brisk morning, after the morning announcements, I strolled to the portable classroom where the middle school students were being housed. I was aware that we only had thirty-three students on roll. So I looked around the room for potential subjects for my study. I soon learned that there were only seven males that fit the profile. Still, it was hopeful, and my spirits were lifted by the fact that I could work with my favorite grade level.

The next day, I found myself grappling with how I would approach the subject of working with the students. Being mindful that I was a new staff member, and I did not know the principal, students or parents very well I began to map out my plan of action. My first thoughts were, *will the principal and parents give me permission to work with these students? Will the students want to participate?*

A few days later, I observed the students in the computer lab and thought about getting my research underway with the middle school males. I knew I would have to ask the teachers to let me speak briefly with the students. I left the computer lab and asked our information specialist (aka data clerk) for a class list to include the demographics.

With list in hand, I asked the teachers to let me see students with an asterisk next to their name on the following day, Tuesday afternoon. I would have to be sure the students would be interested in participating in a study on hip hop and rap. The next



day, the teachers sent seven students to my office. The boys entered my office with mixed facial expressions. One of the boys asked with a legitimate reason, “Are we in trouble?” I relieved their minds when I answered, “Goodness no.” My follow up question was “Should you be in trouble?” (I would later learn that the students equate coming to the principal’s or vice-principal’s office as a sign of trouble).

With a resounding “No Ma’am” from the boys, I was ready to ask my first question. I asked the boys with a most serious look “Do you like hip hop and rap?” With a reluctant smile, one student said, “Yes ma’am.” The boys who hesitated now responded with an enthusiastic “yes, ma’am!” I explained to the boys that I would need to get written consent or permission from the principal, parents and the boys themselves before we could begin.

I entered the principal’s office to talk with him about my research. We spoke briefly because I knew he had so much to do relating to the new middle school. I asked him, “Would you mind if I conducted a survey to see if any students would be interested in participating in my research study?” I was elated that he said “yes”.

A couple of weeks passed before I could officially meet with the students. Every day the students would come by my office inquiring about the starting date and time. The most frequently asked question, “When are we going to get started?” I did not want to tell them that I had encountered some concerns relating to my research and that some of the adults did not feel the same way as I did about this study. However, the school district’s Office of Accountability e-mailed me to come for a meeting. I left after dismissal to meet with a wonderful young lady. She greeted me with a pleasant smile. I held my breath as she reviewed my application. A sigh a relief came over me as she said

the wonderful words, “We just had a few questions for you and then you will be approved”. The questions related to was I going to use any assessments since the students were given a lot testing. I assured her I would use the assessment, if necessary that were already being administered. She had a question about the use of the hip hop survey. That satisfied the young lady and I was given a letter of approval.

With great support and encouragement, the district’s Office of Accountability and Research gave the green light in December 2008. I was impressed that my research would be an interest to the district as a vehicle to help students, especially African American males. Finally, on December 5, 2008, after permission was granted by the school district, I asked the middle school teachers to send the students to my office for a brief talk. The teachers agreed on a time that would not interfere with instructional time. The student would be coming at 1:30 on Tuesdays and Fridays. I could hardly wait to meet with the students. I toiled all night to think of the approach I would use with the students.

This meeting was held in my office. I shared that as middle school students, I wanted to use hip hop and rap materials to teach math, reading and writing. Our agenda included taking a rap and hip hop interest survey and discussing how and when hip hop began. I audio taped the boys’ responses. We agreed by the next meeting, the boys would create their hip hop names to maintain anonymity during the study. I said to the boys “On our next meeting, you need to create a symbol for your hip hop name. Also, I want to know the significance of your name.”

I knew my research would focus on “two cultures,” today’s Black male youth culture meets school culture, using hip hop and rap culture in their school life; however, I had the next challenge to face.

I love the challenge of working with students who have had difficulties in the traditional school settings. Most of my teaching career has been spent working with students, especially Black males, who were very bright, but did not adjust or adapt to the traditional learning environment. In *Performing Identity/ Performing Culture: Hip Hop as Text, Pedagogy, and Live Practice*, Greg Dimitriadis’s ethnography of urban youth and their use hip hop in their daily lives was pertinent to my study. Thus, I decided that an ethnography inquiry would be most fitting. Ethnography evolves from the field of anthropology (Glesne, 2006; Fetterman, 1998). Although this research was grounded in the theoretical framework of critical race theory as well as Geneva Gay’s ‘culturally relevant pedagogy’ and Ladson-Billings ‘culturally responsive teaching’, the first thing I did was to establish the number of males in the sixth grade and then look at non Caucasians to determine the number of possible AA males in the population. The numbers were minimum, but promising. What an opportunity to conduct an ethnographical research with the sixth grade males to include examining how rap and hip hop culture can be used to meet the cultural, social and academic needs of African American male students.

As a woman of African American heritage, I acknowledge the profound power of music in my culture. As a teacher for the last sixteen years, I used popular music as a powerful influence to engage students in lessons for years. The music I used included rock and roll, rhythm and blues, jazz, country, classic and rap.

Drawing on my past experiences as a teacher, I decided to explore how popular culture, especially hip-hop culture can be used to engage African American males in culturally relevant pedagogy. Hip-hop culture has had an impact on music, fashion, identity and language. By using hip-hop culture, teachers can address the curricular needs of students, particularly African American male, I attempted to address several questions: How do African American students understand /perceive hip hop in the context of academics? How does hip hop and rap address the societal issues of African American students? How can hip hop and rap be used in a positive way to impact the cultural needs of students, especially African American male students?

### The Students

One cool afternoon, seven male students in the sixth grade, ages 11 to 12 entered my office. I would later learn that most of the students had attended Hesse since kindergarten. Initially, I thought about using a narrative inquiry with the students, but after my preprospectus defense, I considered ethnography inquiry as an option for my study. Drawing on the works of Greg Dimitriadis, in “performing identity”, when he worked with a group of males I surmised that an ethnographic approach would be appropriate for my study in the use of hip hop culture and rap music and videos. As I looked at the students standing in my office, I realized that I was looking at the potential “crew” for the hip hop and rap study. I gave them a brief overview of my hip hop and rap study and a permission letter for consent. I explained to them I would meet with them again on Friday. The students were relieved that they were not being referred to my office by their teachers for disciplinary actions.

### The NeighborhoodHOOD

I noted that the students and I were part of a small urban school district in Southeast Georgia with a large enrollment of African American students. With over 30,000 students in the district, school system was committed to serving the needs of a diverse population. The students attend a neighborhood school in a community in Savannah, Georgia. The community was comprised of White, Black, Hispanic, Asian, and multiracial families. As few as eighty students are bused in the district's transportation department. The community school in which I work was comprised of students from middle to upper middle class families. On a spiritual high note, the school shares its space with one of the local churches on weekends and during the summer months.

Some of the parents are military – in some cases both parents are deployed. In the past two years, the population of African American student has increased. As we move into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the demographics of the United States has continued to evolve rapidly, and schools reflected these changes (Darling-Hammond, 2002, p. 1).

### Moving On Up

When I moved to this southeastern city in 1972, I was bused into a community similar to the one in which I currently work as an assistant principal. I attended a Southside elementary school in a suburban neighborhood and community school. In the 1970s, the families were affluent and predominately White. There was some middle to upper income families. As a thriving community for suburban families, upwardly mobile Black families began moving into the community in the early 1980s. Recently, residents

who could afford it began to sell or rent their homes to move further out of the city to unincorporated areas (e.g. gated communities, new subdivisions) and began sending their children to private schools. Soon the school's community became primarily black middle class families buying and renting homes.

### Old School Daze

I wanted to know a little more about the school before I began my study so I looked at one of the student handbooks. To my surprise, I discovered that Herman W. Hesse Elementary School had its origin in the Old Montgomery School, which was located on Montgomery Road. Built in 1917, it was considered to be the first modern school in Chatham County. Two of the three rooms held six classes. The third room was used for playtime during bad weather.

In 1945, forty-six parents, working nights and weekends, built a kitchen near the school. Parents completed other projects including laying tile, paving walkways, and constructing adequate restrooms. When the student population continued to increase, double sessions were used to help with overcrowding until a new school could be built. In April of 1963, the Herman W. Hesse Elementary School was dedicated. The school opened with 16 classrooms and cost \$299,000 to build. In April 1967, a third wing was added to help serve increasing numbers of students.

Most recently, Hesse Elementary School housed 580 students in grades PreK-6. The ethnic/racial breakdown of the students according to the demographic report was 34.3 % Black, 56.4% White and 9.3 % multi-racial. The ethnicity breakdown for other groups, such as Asian, Hispanic and Pacific Islander is less than 1% of the population.

There were 46 certified teaching staff members of which only seven are African American. The majority of the faculty was veteran with more than ten years of experience.

The vast majority of the students walked or carpooled to school. There were only five school buses, one of which picks up two of our special needs students. There was an overwhelming parental support through local Parent Teacher Association (PTA). PTA meeting attendance is standing room only with the number of parents outnumbering the faculty and staff. The Annual Fall Family Bingo Night, the Jamboree and the Family Movie Night are supported by the administrators, parents, teachers and students. The Hesse parents are staunch supporters of the school. What a surprise for parents when the school district gave parents another option when Hesse became an elementary school with a middle grades program this school year.

### Data, Data, Data

I had few challenges with the type of data needed. Since ethnographers conduct interviews, surveys, questionnaires, and focus group discussions, I knew that I had my work cut out for me. My challenge was building a rapport with the boys. To combat this potential challenge, I began attending their classes and talking with them at lunchtime.

The day before we were to meet, one of the boys came by my office to inform me he would not be able to participate in the study. Five of the boys brought in their consent forms. I thanked them and asked about one student who had not come at all. I was told he was absent. I told the boys to meet me on Friday.

### Don't Stop Until You Get Enough

As Michael Jackson's song goes "Don't Stop Until You Get Enough", I wanted to make sure I had enough data for my ethnography. Ethnographic research has been used to answer questions regarding politics, communities, health institutions, and education, just to name a few. Fieldwork is the initial focus of an ethnographer's navigating through the social and cultural experiences of other cultures. "The ethnographer conducts research in the native environment to see people and their behavior given all the real-world incentives and constraints" (Fetterman, p. 31).

The boys entered the office ready to start. As Fetterman, notes, ethnographers conduct research in their "native environment," I asked the boys to follow me to the media center so that we would have more space. After we settled into the media center, I gave the boys the term Hip Hop Culture and had them to brainstorm a list of words that relate to the hip hop. The boys gave me five words each that represent the hip hop culture. We talked briefly about the cultural impact of rap and hip hop. I asked questions such as:

*Do you like hip hop and rap?*

*Do you know it has influences of martial arts, gymnastics, African music, and salsa? How did Hip Hop get started?*

*Do you like wearing hip hop style? What clothing does you like wearing?*

The boys answered the questions on paper. After completing the survey, we talked about their responses. I could tell the boys were very excited about the survey. I told the boys to meet with me on Monday afternoon.



In educational ethnography, one would study a group of people or culture as they relate to educational issues. In his book, *The Next Generation: An Ethnography of Education*, Ogbu's educational research on a community of African Americans and Mexicans provided insight into the beliefs, behavior and functions of that neighborhood. Like Ogbu, Janet Ward's book *Black and White in School: Trust, Tension or Tolerance?* was an ethnography study that focused on beliefs and behaviors of a particular group. Furthermore, Ward's study looked at relations and dynamics in classrooms to the policies of the local board of education and the city.

As I met with the boys, I knew that the ethnographic inquiry would be just the right approach. Ethnographers enter the field to study a culture with a problem of interest or to study, a theory, a research design, and data collection methods (Fetterman, 1998; LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). Ethnography is a way to obtain a face to face interaction with a group outside of one's own culture and experiences. The end product of ethnography –the story or narrative—constitutes a theoretically informed interpretation of the culture of the community, group, or setting. (LeCompte et al, 1999). Fetterman writes, "The ethnographer strides into a culture or social situation to explore its terrain and to collect and analyze data" (p.31).

Ethnographers use many techniques for gathering information for research. Interviewing is one way that ethnographers gather data. I planned to conduct informal surveys, interviews with open-ended and close-ended questions and observations with the participants.

On Monday, the boys were standing at my office door. This time there were only five boys. I learned that one student could not participate because his grades were low,

and his parent did not want him to join until his grades had improved. The boys appeared very anxious to get started. I told the boys I wanted to learn more about their interest and knowledge of hip hop and rap, so I had an informal questionnaire that I wanted to use with them. We got in a group and held a discussion using the questions below:

- 1. What type of music do you like listen to?*
- 2. Do you like to listen to rap?*
- 3. Who are the top 5 rappers or hip hop artists?*
- 4. How many CD's do you own?*
- 5. What was the last CD you bought?*
- 6. What is Puff Daddy's current name?*
- 7. Do you listen to other types of music or strictly rap?*
- 8. Do you think the Beastie Boys are rap or rock?*
- 9. Do you listen to rap with your parents with in the car?*
- 10. Are you familiar with the following artists?*

*Young Jeezy*

*Lil Wayne*

*Akon*

*Dr. Dre*

*Busta Rhymes*

*Wyclef Jean*

*50 cent*

*Eminem*

*Paul Wall*

*Outkast*

*Will Smith*

*T.I.*

*LL Cool J*

*(The rationale for selecting the rappers is to give a list of old school and new school rappers. Old school refers to rap stars from the late 1970's to late 1980's. New school refers to rappers who began circa 1990 )*

General interviews types include structured, semi- structured, informal, and retrospective interviews. Formally structured and semi structured interviews are verbal approximations of a questionnaire with explicit research goals. The interview was audio-taped. On Tuesday, to address the students' views on hip hop and rap and its relationship to societal issues, I asked the following questions:

- 1. In your opinion, what is the most important aspect of hip hop music?*
- 2. Who is the best rapper currently making albums? Explain.*
- 3. There is a lot made of "keepin' it real" in hip hop, what does that mean to you? Do you think/feel rappers keep it real?*
- 4. Hip hop is known for its realism about life. What you do think is the greatest problem facing our generation in the United States? World? (e.g. Economy, Terrorism, Drugs, Family Breakdown, Diseases, Hunger, Global Warming, etc.)Explain.*
- 5. Talk about what you have learned about the Civil Rights Movement (e.g. Martin L. King, Jr., Rosa Parks, March on Washington, boycott,*

*desegregation, etc.) Do you think hip represents today's civil rights movement? Why or why not?*

6. *If a music executive wanted to offer you an opportunity to become the next rapper or hip hop star, what would you do? Explain your answer.*

Common themes or patterns occur as one study another culture. I compared the interviews and surveys to see if common themes emerge. I hoped this study of hip hop addresses the societal issues that plague African American males. In addition, I hoped that African American males will see the significance of hip hop and rap in their school culture. Furthermore, I hoped that positive images of hip hop and rap emerge to meet the cultural needs of African American male students.

#### Potential Challenges to the Study

This study had its challenges. The first and foremost was the limited number of African American male students who attend my elementary school. In addition, this researcher had limited access to the students during the instructional time.

Secondly, while there are several works on the commercialism of hip hop and its impact on student lives, there is very little scholarly literature on the impact of hip hop on African American males' perception of hip hop within the academic arena, hip hop and cultural relevance in school, and how hip hop addresses educational issues.

Thirdly, there was an initial reluctance by some of parents who allowed their children to participate in a study of hip hop and rap to occur in a school setting. After a brief explanation of the research, the parents granted permission.

Finally, I had one student to drop out of the study. Fortunately, I had another student to join the study later in the year.

The challenges of the study were met with perseverance and determination on the part of the researcher to accomplish the task of conducting research with and for students whose needs would be met academically, socially and culturally.

I will present the results in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 4

### GETTING STARTED

In September 2008, I began to think about the fact that I had moved to a new school. Also, I pondered how was I going to conduct my research with African American males using hip hop and rap. As I recall my fascination with hip hop had evolved from my years of working as a fifth grade teacher in another elementary school with a predominately Black student population and alternative education programs for secondary students. In most cases, the students were doing poorly academically; however, the students were aware of hip hop and rap artists and their music. It was sheer delight to know they had memorized the most popular tune, yet they could not remember a social studies lesson on the revolutionary war or a science lesson the life cycle of a frog. These same students did not want to recite poetry, but would say the lyrics of a popular rap and not miss a beat.

Three months earlier, I had been assigned to an elementary school that would be starting up a middle grades program. There were approximately 33 sixth grade students who opted to remain at the school rather than attend a traditional middle school, specialty middle school, or even a private school. My challenges were having very few students and developing a rapport of trust and mutual respect in a very short period of time. Over the next two months, I observed the frustration some of these students faced academically and socially. At this point, I realized these students needed a culturally relevant curriculum (Ladson-Billing, 1994). Cultural backgrounds may be diverse, but a curriculum that includes information that appreciates and celebrates one's own culture is vital to helping students connect with language arts, math, music and literature. Many

cultures have months to celebrate (e.g. Black History Month, Latino History, etc.) that help others learn about other ethnic groups.

While hip hop and rap originated with Black and Latino/a/s, the culture has transcended other cultures and ethnic groups, such as Caucasians, Asians, Native American; I embraced hip hop and rap as a vehicle to study African American male students in an academic setting. The students are prepared daily for other academic opportunities, especially formal and informal assessments and high stakes testing [e.g. CRCT, ITBS, Quarterly Assessment (school district benchmarks),] etc. The CRCT testing is by far the most crucial. Students need culturally relevant material to do well.

After observing and talking with several students in the cafeteria during the first few weeks of school, I approached several of the sixth grade students to ask them how they liked being at the school for middle school. Many were excited to stay. Few of them had a choice because the parents lovingly convinced them to stay in the nurturing, close-knit school family.

### Meeting of the Minds

With great anticipation of proceeding with my study, I gave consent forms to the boys to take home. I waited a few days and then the problems began. Initially, I thought this would be the easiest of my task; it was not. Literally, I had to jump through hoops. The negative perception that hip hop and rap represents created much doubt that the study would be appropriate with many of the people from whom I needed permission.

Many adults abhor hip hop and rap without really understanding what it means to the youth culture, especially Black youth culture. While I understand this position, I have witnessed how students can make hip hop and rap a positive part of their life.

Subsequently, I sent home seven forms, only five were returned (two parents refused to participate in the study). My principal informed me that two of the parents were not happy that I was singling out African American males to conduct my study. With that information, I was crushed and distressed. I wanted to speak with the parents to explain what I was doing. I was told that was not a wise move and that the parents were going to call the school board. I thought to myself, *who knows this research more than I do?* I was not going to speak any of the parents without my principal's approval.

As fate would have it, one of my parents had another child attending the school who had a problem on the school bus. It was my job to call her about the bus issue. After discussing the bus incident, I inquired about the parental consent for her son to participate in the study. I shared that I was working on finding a positive way to present hip hop and rap to students who influenced by the culture. Despite my explanation, she was brief, but candid about a previous incident in which her son was mistreated because of his race. After listening to her story, I thanked her for being so open and told her that she could refuse for her child to participate. It relieved my mind that it was not personal.

Another parent had similar concerns about her sons being selected for a study using African American males. One of her sons walked in with a dismal disposition and said "Please call my grandmother or mother". I telephoned the parent regarding her concerns about my research. The parent asked so many questions about my study; it literally prepared me to defend my position on rap and hip hop culture. Her sons were actually as she corrected me were "multiracial." Eventually, I was able to convince the parent that this was a relevant study and that I expected positive outcomes for our male students. Listen in on the conversation that I had with one of the parents.



**Researcher:** Hello, Mrs.\_\_\_\_\_. I understand that you do not want your children to participate in my study.

**Parent:** Actually, I do not mind, but I did have a few questions.

**Researcher:** I will be happy to talk with you on the phone or in person.

**Parent:** I just wanted to know why did you single out African American males and why are you using hip hop and rap music? I do not allow my boys to listen to that kind of music.

**Researcher:** I understand how you must feel, because a lot of what we see is negative images as it relates to hip hop and rap music, especially videos. My research will focus on a culture that fascinates me. I chose African American males because of my past work with black male students. It has been my experience that some of them do not find school interesting or important. Many times they will recite raps or sing songs before they will learn their academic material. Back to your question, yes ma'am, I will be using rap and hip hop music and other things in my study. I want to focus on finding positive images of hip hop culture.

**Parent:** My boys are not just African American. They are mixed with German and Indian.

**Researcher:** Yes, ma'am. I appreciate you sharing that information.

**Parent:** What is positive about rap music? I see the videos and how they portray thugs and violence. There is so much profanity and girls showing everything. You know, I just do not like what I have seen.

**Researcher:** I agree, but this is the way I see it. Your children enjoy the music, the clothes, and the hip language. They are a part of the hip hop culture whether we accept it or not. With this research, we, meaning the boys and I will be able to explore how to look for positive aspects of the culture. I plan to do lesson plans in reading, language arts and math using rap music. We will look at the media images of hip hop and make our own advertising in a more positive way.

**Parent:** Will my children be listening to rap music?

**Researchers:** Only with parental permission. Don't worry; we will only use the clean version. We will create our own raps to be used in learning math and other subjects.

**Parent:** Will students do a special project?

**Researcher:** Yes, they will do a PowerPoint presentation on their favorite rapper. This will be the culminating project.

**Parent:** Both of my sons are interested, but at this time I will allow one of them to participate. Once J\_\_\_\_\_ has improved his grades, he can join your group.

**Researcher:** Thank you so much. The boys will start in one week.

The parent promised that her child would join the study if he brought up his grades by the end of the marking period. I agreed to her terms because I knew her child really wanted to participate.

### Meet the Boyz

On December 12, 2008, our first official meeting, the boys entered my office ready to start. I ordered pizza for our meeting. The boys were ready to share their hip hop names. The boys will later be referred to as MC Money, Twinkey, Lil B, Baby Face, and Rock Solid (Table1). Rock Solid, the most artistic of the group dropped out later, but we were later joined by a new member Big Dre.

TABLE 1

#### *Hip Hop Names*

Student	Hip Hop Name
S.W.	Rock Solid(dropped out March)
S.D.	Babyface
E.R.	MC Money
J.W.	Twinkey
B.S.	Lil B
J.W.	Big Dre( joined in March)

Between munching on his pizza and gulping his soda, MC Money, one of the most mature students of the group, erupted with, “Mrs. Spikes, you need a hip hop name!” “Yeah” the other boys chimed in as they swallowed their pizza. I could tell they were really enjoying this meeting. “Let’s call her MC Spikes,” said Lil B. The other boys gave approving nods and a unanimous, “yeah!” “Okay, I can live with that,” I responded, even though I did not know if that name suited me. At the time, I could not think of anything better. MC Spikes coming to the mic, hum...

**SD** Look at my face (rubbing his chin). I have a baby face. My name is Babyface.

**Boys:** (laughing out loud)

**Researcher:** So your name is like Kenneth “Babyface” Edmonds. Good. Coming to the mic is Babyface...

*Track 1: Babyface*

*“African Queen”*

*“Yeah, you are my African queen, oooh lord, oooh lord*

*Just like the sun, lights up the earth, you light up my life*

*The only one, I’ve ever seen with a smile so bright*

*And just yesterday, you came around my way*

*And changed my whole scenery with your astonishing*

*beauty”*

*(Tupac Shakur)*

With a boyish charm and jovial smile, “Babyface” was well-liked by his peers and the teachers. “Babyface” was the most playful of the group of boys. He loved to tease and joke around during the sessions. Sometimes, this was allowed; other times it was met with a challenge from the guys who wanted to get started with their projects. He called himself “Babyface” because his face looked as if he was elementary school (perhaps fifth grade).

Like Tupac, Babyface wore his bling bling (jewelry). The day after springbreak, “Babyface” wore a little too much jewelry for his teachers’ satisfaction. Subsequently, his homeroom teacher summoned me to come to check out his bling bling. I thought his

jewelry was interesting because he looked like a rapper; however, his Mohawk “hair” was a little more distracting. I called his parents and asked them to have him wear a little less distracting jewelry. His dad was very cooperative and promised to talk with “Babyface” when he arrived home from school.

“Babyface” talked about his family quite often. He was the baby of his family with one sister. He loved his mother so much. He referred to her as very pretty. Perhaps, “African Queen” would best describe how he felt about his mother. He was especially proud of his father who worked in technology. He once said, “I can get my dad to help us make some rap music.” I asked, “Are you sure?” A week later I held a conference with his dad and I asked “Did Babyface mentioned anything about getting you to help with a hip hop music project?” His dad smiled and said, “Yes.” Since “Babyface” favorite hobby was using the computer, especially the Internet, which he used to download his music, his dad was happy to assist us. Fortunately, the school website had limited access to some sites because “Babyface” would sometimes surf the wrong sites. Not surprisingly, Babyface did an awesome PowerPoint project on his favorite rapper, Tupac.

**Researcher:** Who is next?

**B.S.:** My name is Lil B, because I like the way it sounds.

**Researcher:** Sounds a little like Lil’ Bow Wow or Lil’ Wayne. Next on the mic we have Lil B...

*Track 2: Lil B*

*#1 Fan*

*It's Plies, baby [Plies, baby]*

*A next time you see somebody*

*Homie that's so bad that you can't resist them*

*Walk up to them and tell that you are*

*the #1 Fan (Plies)*

“Lil B” was the most comical and friendliest of the boys. Like Babyface, he was well-liked by his peer group, especially the female students. I would learn early during the study, that I had a prior connection to “Lil B”’s family fifteen years earlier. His older brother was one of my former students.

One afternoon after leaving school, I stopped by a Kroger’s to buy spaghetti sauce for dinner when I spied Mrs. Jordon stocking the bread shelf. We had our usual talk about family and work. When I mentioned I was at Hesse Elementary, she shared that her grandson; B was a sixth grader at the same school. I could not believe it. I told her he was in my hip my hop group project. She told me that her other grandson, “Lil B”’s older brother was doing great. I told her to tell Earl “hello” for me and that I would see her later. She agreed to do just that and told me to have a nice day.

During one of our sessions we had a talk about families. “Lil B” talked about his mother, grandmother and big brother. I told “Lil B” that I knew his mother, grandmother and brother. I told “Lil B”, he seem to love hip hop fashion. Similarly, his older brother,

Earl wore his fashion of the times, circa 1990's. Although we had a uniform policy, "Lil B" always sported his hip hop gear on school "dress down" days.

In addition, he loved to rap and dance. "Lil B" talked about Plies incessantly. In every focus group session, he would bring up the name of Plies. "Lil B" would say, "Mrs. Spikes, have you ever heard of Plies?" My answer was always the same, "No, who is he?" or "Tell me about him? I really made "Lil B" and the other boys break out with laughter when I tried to pronounce Plies. It was quite obvious his favorite rapper was a new comer, known as Plies.

**Researcher:** The next one coming to the mic is MC Money.

**ER:** I like to work with my uncle to make money. I am MC Money.

**Researcher:** Let's hear for the Money Man, up next on the mic is "MC Money"...

### *Track 3: MCMoney*

#### *Airforces*

*I went from old school chevys to drop top Porsches*

*You couldn't walk a mile off my air forces*

*And you ain't seen what I've seen*

*I can get a 100,000 in these Sean John jeans*

*I went from old school Chevy to drop top Porsches*

*You couldn't walk a mile off my air forces*

*And you ain't did what I did*

*Where you from, you gotta have you life.*

*(Young Jeezy)*

“MC Money,” was a challenging student for me to develop a rapport. Initially, he would miss school days and the students would tell me he was out. Once the students got started with the research, the students shared an update of the projects and events with “MC Money.” Eventually, his attendance improved. “MC Money” began to demonstrate his leadership aptitude. He was given the responsibility to assist the boys with their PowerPoint projects.

MC Money became the spokesperson for the group. He would come by my office to give me the message that the boys wanted to meet more often. I told him that I would check with teachers. A week before the winterbreak, I saw him going to the media center. I inquired about his grades. He said that he was bringing the grades up. He was meeting with his teacher to see how he could improve. A day before our break for the Christmas holidays, MC Money came in with a big smile and declared, “Mrs. Spikes, I have my progress report to show you.” I said, “Okay, how is it looking?” I was overjoyed when I saw he had improved in all areas, especially math, his lowest subject. I told him, “I am proud of you.” MCMoney grinned and left to return to his class.

MC Money liked money so much that he would spend his spare time working with his uncle to earn his own money. When the group met, he constantly talked about his uncle’s lawncare business. Once I asked him, “When do you work with your uncle?” MC Money responded shyly, “I go with my uncle on the weekends and school holidays.”

MC Money continued, “I do lawns, like cutting grass and raking leaves. Stuff like that.” I said “Good. Very Good.” The boys loved making money, but he did not mind sharing it. MCMoney even shared that he gave money to his sister and brother. *That was really nice, I thought to myself.*



When it was time to do his PowerPoint, he selected his favorite rapper, Young Jeezy, for his project. He spent countless hours working on his assignment. Like so many rappers, MC thought it was “all about the Benjamins” (money).

**JW:** I like Twinkies. So my name is going to be Twinkie.

**Researcher:** Just like the Debbie cake.

**JW:** I am going to spell it differently. I will spell it T-w-i-n-k-e-y.

**Researcher:** Twinkey. Okay. I got it. Coming to the mic to dazzle your mind is Twinkey...

*Track 4: Twinkey*

*Curtains Up*

*Still on?*

*Yo, is the mic on?*

*Check, check, check*

*Alright, let's do it*

*Let's go, come on*

*Eminen, Eminen, Eminen*

(Twin) key, a twin, by far was the most inquisitive of the group. While I always had an agenda for our group session, Twinkey had a series of “why” questions. Many times I could see that his questions were also the sentiments of the group. He had two questions regarding the newly established middle grades program that plagued his mind. Two questions were: 1) why don't we have any male teachers or male coaches? And 2) why don't we have any sports for students? Interestingly enough, the next Parent Meeting for middle grade parents, Twinkey's grandmother asked that the principal and

athletic director address the latter question. Twinkey was concerned about inequality in society. During one of sessions, Twinkey shared a story about being followed in a convenience store by a man whom he assumed was the owner /manager or store clerk. He asked why it happens when you know you are not going to steal anything. I shared that some stores have had students who were up to mischief and that perhaps that the store personnel was watching for any student. Twinkey thought he was singled out because he was Black. I assured him that in some instances, that may be true, but in this situation, he must do all he can to go in the store, preferably with very few students and complete his transaction and leave. In another session, he asked is it okay for a policeman to stop you on your bike and ask for identification? I did not have enough information about the situation, but I asked Twinkey to make sure he follows the rules of the road and wears a helmet. He seemed satisfied with my responses in both scenarios.

Twinkey was an honor roll student, who played in the school band and was an avid writer. During one of our sessions, Twinkey asked could we look over everyone's PowerPoint. His purpose was to help all of the students in the group. I agreed because of all the PowerPoint presentations, his report on rapper, Eminem, was the well-written and creatively designed.

**Researcher:** Okay. Let me see if I can remember the names. Lil B, Babyface, MC Money, and Twinkey.

**Boys:** Rock Solid

**SW** (softly) I am solid as a rock. My name is Rock Solid.

**Researcher:** Yes, Rock Solid. All right, let's work on the symbols.

Rock Solid was the most artistic of the group. He was soft spoken and very quiet. Although he did not stay with the study very long, he worked very hard on the projects assigned.

Finally coming to the mic, Big Dre...

*Track 5: Big Dre.*

*GO DJ*

*Yea, yea, yea*

*Grows up in between, children and babies*

*Right about now its yo boy, ya heard, back again*

*DJ Mannie (Lil Wayne)*

Finally, Big Dre, twin to Twinkey, joined the group later in the study; however, he was the most vocal. Like his twin brother, he had similar “why” questions. He questioned why the school did not offer athletics. He talked about cultural diversity and society issues. It was important that all people were respected and valued regardless of their racial and ethnic background, socioeconomic status, and educational level. He was with his brother when they entered a store and he and his brother felt they were being followed. He questioned the way people were treated in society. He wanted everyone to have equal access to jobs, healthcare and education. He was a conscientious student who was avid athlete and talented musician. Like his favorite rapper, Lil Wayne, and his namesake, *Dr. Dre*, Big Dre enjoyed rapping *freestyle*.

After several months of observing and conducting focus group discussions with the students, I built a rapport with the boys as I listened to them share their experience whether in or out of school. I compiled a profile of each student participant. The

pseudonyms were used throughout the study. Next, the boys completed the brainstorm activity on what hip hop culture represented to them. The students were asked to list words that relate to hip hop culture. The results of the brainstorm activity on Hip Hop Culture are listed in Table 2.

TABLE 2

*Hip Hop Culture Brainstorm Activities Results:*

<b>Rock Solid</b>	<b>Twinkey</b>	<b>MC Money</b>	<b>Lil B</b>	<b>Babyface(absent)</b>
<i>Clothes</i>	<i>Clothes</i>	<i>Clothes</i>	<i>Clothes</i>	
Music	<i>Cars</i>	<i>Nice cars</i>	<i>Cars</i>	
Singing	<i>Cribs</i>	<i>Big house</i>	Songs	
Dancing	<i>Money</i>	<i>Money</i>	<i>Money</i>	
Design	Shoes	<i>Jewelry</i>	<i>Jewels</i>	
Style	Fame	Own office	Girls	

It is evident that the boys have specific thoughts about hip hop culture. For these boys, hip hop represent things such as fine clothes, flashy jewelry, fancy cars and fabulous cribs/homes. The biggest part of hip hop culture is money, money and more money.

On December 15, the students worked in pairs to create timelines (Appendix K) on hip hop. I provided books and magazines as they looked up information. To make it relevant, I asked the boys to include their birthdates and other significant dates to show how their lives intertwined with the hip hop history. I (MC Spikes) got the attention of the boys by saying, “Let’s look at the timelines you created for hip hop and talk about the

key people during the time. Tell something significant or important about hip hop history.” I will refer to myself as researcher during the focus group discussion.

**Babyface:** The founder of hip hop was Afrika Bambaataa. He was a DJ.

**Researcher:** What does it mean to DJ?

**Babyface:** It like getting the right records to play at party.

**Researcher:** Like a block party.

**Babyface:** Yeah. Getting the sounds just right for the party

**Researcher:** Okay. Does anybody have anything else to add?

**Lil B:** When I was born, Biggie Smalls was killed.

**Researcher:** What year?

**Lil B:** 1997

**Researcher:** Have you seen any of his videos?

**Boys:** Yes ma’am.

**Lil B:** He was with P.Diddy.

**Researcher:** You mean Sean “Puffy” Coombs.

**Rock Solid:** Russell Simmons formed Def Jam Records in 1984

**Researcher:** That’s right. He was married to the lady who designs Baby Phat.

**Rock Solid:** Kimora Simmons.

**Researcher:** Okay. She has a show on one of the cable channels.

**MC Money:** In 2004, hip hop summit registered two million youth voters. I thought that was good.

**Twinkey:** The first gangsta CD was released by NWA in 1991.

**Researcher:** No one mentioned that in 1999, actually ten years ago, Lauryn Hill was

the first woman nominated for ten grammy awards. Can you believe it?

Ten Grammy awards. She sort of dropped out of sight. She was fabulous.

**Twinkey:** I think saw something about Queen Latifah.

**Lil B:** Wasn't she the first female rapper?

**Researcher:** Are you sure? Look up it in the Vibe book on the table. Now let's see what else on the timelines. I remember 1979, I was in high school and Kurtis Blow and the Sugar Hill Gang was as they say "the happening". What is the saying now? What is the phrase now?

**Twinkey:** That's what's up?

**Researcher:** Okay, that's what's up?

**Lil B:** Mrs. Spikes, you got it. Do you know we are having fun? When I first came to your office, I thought I was in some kind of trouble. But we like coming to you. Some other students want to join.

**Researcher:** We will see. Maybe next year. Why did you think you were in trouble? You think if you come to the assistant principal's office that you are in trouble?

**Boys:** Yes!

**Twinkey:** You are like cool. I don't think we ever have someone let us study something like rap music at school.

**Researcher:** Well guys, I am glad to work with you too. It has not been easy getting started, but we will do just fine. I am glad to work with middle school students. Okay let's finish up. Time is running out.

The discussion on Afrika Bambaataa, DJ Kool Herc, Sugar Hill Gang, Kurtis Blow and MC Lyte ( one of the first female rappers, who currently has a minor role on the sitcom “Half and Half”) was mesmerizing for the boys. We did clear up one fact, Queen Latifah was not the first female rapper, MC Lyte had that honor. After we talked about the origin of hip hop in the South Bronx with Latino and Black youth, I prepared the boys that at the next meeting. I will be assessing their knowledge and familiarity with hip hop terminology using a Vocabulary Quiz (Appendix F). The five students’ responses to the hip hop quiz were noted below:

TABLE 3

*Hip Hop Quiz Results*

Question #	Q 1	Q 2	Q 3	Q 4	Q 5	Q 6	Q 7	Q 8	Q9	Q1 0	Q1 1
# Correct of Responses	5/ 5	5/ 5	1/ 5	4/ 5	5/ 5	5/ 5	5/ 5	5/ 5	5/5	5/5	5/5

The students did very well on the quiz. The question number three relating to the term battle was the one that most of the student gave an incorrect response. The term means to have a rap off or a dance off. The choice given was to combine both responses, only one students answered correctly.

In addition, as the students worked on their quiz, I conducted individual interviews on hip hop and rap using interview questions I created.

The results of the individual interview are listed in the following table:

TABLE 4

*Hip Hop Interest Survey Results*

	Rock Solid	MC Money	Twinkey	Lil B	Babyface
Do you like hip- hop?	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Do you know the influences of martial arts, gymnastics, African music, and salsa?	N	N	N	N	N
How did hip hop get started?	N	N	N		
Do you like wearing hip hop style?	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
What kinds of clothing do you like wearing?					

The boys liked hip hop, especially wearing hip hop style clothing. The students knew very little about the factors that influence hip hop.

During the next focus group session, students worked on a math rap called “Fraction Rap” (Appendix E). The boys worked in two groups to battle (to do a rap off) the fraction rap. I reminded the students, “Hey guys, our time will be ending soon.” The meeting concluded on that note. We called the ending of our meeting “The W (rap) Up.”

On December 19, 2008, we ordered two large pizzas--one pepperoni and one meat lovers (my favorite) and held an informal session. I wanted the boys to join me for



lunch and discuss how things were going at school. Typically, the boys were given an agenda. On this day, the boys were given an opportunity to discuss whatever they wanted. While we waited for the arrival of our lunch, the boys spoke incessantly about rap and hip hop and various rappers. The boys asked me if I knew Plies. First and foremost, I honestly told them I did not know Plies. Furthermore, I did not know how to pronounce his name. The boys giggled as I try to phonetically say” PLIES” (I think it rhymes with flies).

Finally the pizza arrived. As we ate lunch, other middle school students passed the office asking could they join the group. The boys beamed with excitement. Apparently, the boys had shared with their classmates that we were going to be doing hip hop and rap and even more importantly, we were going to be eating pizza. Go figure.

As we cleaned up our area, the students wanted to know when we would meet. I told them I would check with their teachers to get a set time for our group time. To be sure the boys knew the focus of our group, I shared with them how they were selected for this study. I told the boys that I had an interest in hip hop and rap. Also, I wanted to work with African American male students who may have a similar interest in hip hop and rap. The boys seemed to be pleased to be a part of this group. I believe the pizza did not hurt my efforts.

A day later, I held a meeting for students to turn in their hip hop name symbols. I was pleased to see the students’ art work and rationale for their hip hop name. This meeting lasted about a half hour. I gave the boys a copy of “Rapper’s Delight” by The Sugar Hill Gang ( Appendix G) and attempted to sing the song as I remembered it. I shared with the boys that this was my favorite song back in the late 70’s.

Listen as the topic of “Rapper’s Delight” was discussed...

**Researcher:** Back in the day, “Rapper’s Delight” by the Sugar Hill Gang was the song.  
Teens of my time would sing this song all the time. Let’s look at the song  
(passing out the lyrics).

**Researcher:** What do you think?

**Rock Solid:** Do you want us to sing this.

**Researcher:** Sure. It is so long. We will just do some of it.

**Lil B:** There is no rhyming in the first section.

**Babyface:** My daddy said he remember rap music being fun. But there was not a lot  
cussing in it back then.

**Researcher:** You are right. Let’s look at the first section. Listen...

(rapping) **I said a hip, hop/The hippy, the hippy/To the hip hip hop/Uh, you don’t  
stop the rockin’/To the bang, bang boogie/ Say up jump the boogie/To the rhythm of  
the boogity beat!”**

**Lil B:** Man, Mrs. Spikes.

**Researcher:** Yeah (crossing arms on chest and leaning to one side).

**Boys:** (break out in laughter)

**Researcher:** I want someone to try this. Ready.

**Boys:** (laughter erupts)

**Lil B:** Can we just practice.

**Researcher:** Let’s practice.

The boys were amused by my rendition of the song, but I continued to sing with such fervor. The boys joined in and we went on for about twenty minutes. Finally, we ended the meeting. The boys would not meet with me again until after the winter break.

### Hip Hop and Academics

On the first day back from the winter break, we met in the library. I had prearranged the use of the area with our media specialist. The students were so excited to meet because they wanted to share the math rap. We ate a snack and began to listen as each group performed their raps. In addition, I gave the students two hilarious poems--“Homework! Oh Homework!” and “Sick” by Jack Prelutsky and Shel Silverstein, respectively( Appendix H) to review for our next meeting.

The boys met with me on a Friday in the media center in our usual meeting area to share the poems turned into raps. We discussed what made the poems so much fun and interesting. I chose the poems because of the topic relating to school. When I talked with the boys on the topic of doing homework, surprisingly, the boys really enjoyed doing homework. Prelusky talks about hating homework and how to destroy homework. So the boys thought the poem was very funny.

When we talked about Silverstein, the boys shared the times they were sick when they were younger. Interestingly, the boys rarely stayed home from school. The poem was so amusing; the boys could not wait to do their rap. I recalled one of the boys in the group had a high absenteeism, but it was not related to sickness. He just stayed home. After the group formed, his attendance improved. Also, I wanted the students to see how

poetry can be turned into rap. I gave the boys full autonomy to turn the Prelutsky and Silverstein poems into raps. Below is an excerpt of the two poems.

**Homework! Oh Homework! (excerpt)**

Homework! Oh homework!

I hate you! You stink!

I wish I could wash your

Away in the sink,

If only a bomb

Would explode you to bits

Homework! Oh homework!

You're giving me fits.

**Sick (excerpt)**

"I cannot go to school today,"

Said little PeggyAnn McKay.

"I have the measles and the mumps,

A gash, a rash and purple bumps.

My mouth is wet, my throat is dry,

I'm going blind in my right eye.

My tonsils are as big as rocks,

I've counted sixteen chicken pox

And there's one more—that's seventeen,

And don't you think my face looks green?

My leg is cut, my eyes are blue---

It might be instamatic flu.

Listen in on the conversation on Def poetry:

**Lil B:** MC Money has our rap, Mrs. Spikes. We are doing “Homework! Oh Homework!”

**Researcher:** Come in. Let’s tape you.

**MC Money:** We have to get our beat.

MC Money and Lil B (performs excerpt of “Homework, Oh homework”)

**Researcher:** Wonderful. Okay. Great job. Twinkey and Babyface, let’s hear your rap.

**Babyface:** Ready (laughs). Come on Twinkey.

**Researcher:** Okay, we will run out of time. Come on guys, get serious.

**Twinkey:** I going to give the beat. Tap, tap, tap tap tap.

Babyface and Twinkey: (performs “Sick”).

**Researcher:** Really nice. Let’s see. How did you guys feel about the poem?

**MC Money:** The poems were kinda silly, but funny.

**Researcher:** Okay, as you can see you can turn any poetry into a rap.

**Lil B:** We can we make up our own raps. Me and Twinkey want to make up a song.

**Researcher:** Anytime. I would love to see some of your original raps.

The boys did an extraordinary job. One group performed freestyle, while the other group decided to do two elements of hip hop: DJing and MCing. Student patrons of the media center became a captive audience.

The boys asked could we do this on the morning announcement. I told them we would have to really need to practice. Unfortunately, time constraints did not permit the students to do the morning announcements.

Finally, to ascertain their interest in hip hop, the boys completed a hip hop questionnaire. The results are presented in Table 5.

TABLE 5

*Hip Hop and Rap Questionnaire Results*

	Lil B	Rock Solid	MC Money	Twinkey	Baby Face
What type of music do you listen to?	HIP HOP BEAT	RAP	Hip hop Country Rap Rock	RAP/ROCK	Rap
Do you like to listen to rap?	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Who are the five top rappers?	Man DM 50 cent Lil Wayne Tupock	50 cent Lil Wayne Plies Souljah boy Jeezy DJ Kaley	Plies 50 cent Eminem Nos Tim Jones	Plies Lil Wayne 50 cent Bow Wow T-Pain	Plies Lil Wayne T Pain DJ Khaled 50 cent
How many of their CD's do you own?	0	8	I do not know	10	10
What was	N	Lil Wayne	50 cent	Lil Wayne	Carter III

the last CD you bought?		Plies 50 cent	Eminem		
What is Puff Daddy's current name?		No (???)	P. Diddy Diddy	Diggy	P. Diddy
Do you listen to other types of music or strictly rap?		Rap	Yes, Kidd rock –rock Alan Jackson- country	Sometimes , rock	N
Do you think the Beastie Boys are rap or rock?		Yes (???)	I do not know	Rock	Rock
Do you listen to rap with your parents in the car?	Y	Y	N	Y	Y

Are you familiar with the following artists?					
Young	N	Y	Y	Y	Y
Jeezy	N	Y	Y	Y	Y
Lil Wayne	N	Y	Y	Y	N
Akon	N	N	N	N	N
Dr. Dre	N	N	Y	Y	N
Busta	N	N	N	N	N
Rhymes	N	Y	Y	Y	Y
Wyclef Jean	N	Y	Y	Y	N
50 cent	N	Y	Y	Y	Y
Run DMC	N		N	N	N
Eminem	N	Y	Y	Y	Y
Mos Def				N	
Paul Wall				Y	
Outkast				Y	
Will Smith					
T.I.					

Y-Yes N-No



The boys agreed their favorite music was rap. Some of them bought rap CDs. Most of the boys would listen to the music with the parents in the car. While 50 cent, Lil Wayne, and Plies were the most popular choice for the students, the most well-known rapper was 50 cent, Young Jeezy, Akon, and surprisingly, Mos Def. Mos Def's raps are usually deep and thought-provoking.

The second week in January, the boys met in my office. Everyone was present, except Babyface. To open the discussion, I posed a question to the boys-- "How can rap be used in classrooms?"

The boys responded in their journals.

The responses were varied, but telling.

**Lil B.:** Bye (sic) making a smart rap. Learning thinks that we need.

**Twinkey:** It can be used to get the message across to kids who like hip hop. Like make a math rap. Rap about our favorite subjects.

**MC Money:** Rap in front of the whole school. Get rap and practice.

**Rock Solid:** (Did not respond)

**Babyface:** (Not present)

With that discussion, I wanted to stay on point with the math curriculum. We looked at some math hip hop questions from websites. The math questions related to the six grade math standards. The math questions were designed to help students understand the hip hop music industry and how to communicate mathematically. The boys were each given the first three questions to work on with a partner. Also, as a group we talked about the rap business (Question #4 in the table below).

TABLE 6

*Hip Hop Math Questions*

Hip Hop Questions Created by Rhonda Schilling	Hip Hop Math Objectives	Georgia Performance Standards
<p>1. Your favorite radio or TV station plays only the top 40 hip hop songs each day. Total, there are 5,000 different songs to choose from. What percentage of music are they playing? What percentage are they not? Why do you think they choose to play the same 40 songs every day?</p>	<p><b>A.4.3 Connect mathematical learning with other subjects, personal experiences, current events, and personal interests</b></p> <p><b>A.8.2 Communicate logical arguments clearly to show why a result makes sense</b></p>	<p>M6A2</p> <p>a. Analyze and describe patterns arising from mathematical rules, tables, and graphs.</p>
<p>2. Of the top 40 hip hop songs played each day “Runaway Love” by gets played 4 times, “Say it Right” gets played 3 times, “Irreplaceable” gets played twice the amount as “Say It Right”, and “I Wanna Love You” gets played half the amount as “Runaway Love.” The rest of the songs only get played once.</p> <p>a. Create an equation that shows the air play distribution. (i.e. <math>40 = 4x + 3y + 6z + 2a + 25</math>)</p> <p>b. In the above equation, if the top 4 songs still get</p>	<p><b>F.8.4 Use linear equations and inequalities in a variety of ways</b></p>	<p>b. Use manipulatives or draw pictures to solve problems involving proportional relationships</p>

played the same amount, and 20 other songs get played once, how much will “What Goes Around” get played?		
3. BMG controls 22% of music. Universal controls 26%, Sony controls the same percentage as BMG, and EMI and Warner control half of what Sony does. What percentage of music does Warner and EMI control? What percentage of the music business do these 5 companies control?	<b>A.4.3 Connect mathematical learning with other subjects, personal experiences, current events, and personal interests</b>	c. Use proportions ( $a/b=c/d$ ) to describe relationships and solve problems, including percent problems.
4. Rap Business – see Hip Hop Street Curriculum by Jawanza Kunjufu pages 34-35.	<b>B.8.5 Apply proportional thinking in a variety of problem situations that include, but are not limited to</b>  • <b>ratios and proportions (e.g., rates, scale drawings*, similarity*)</b>  • <b>percents, including those greater than 100 and less than one (e.g., discounts, rate</b>	d. Describe proportional relationships mathematically using $y=kx$ , where $k$ is the constant of proportionality.

	<b>of increase or decrease, sales tax)</b>	
<p>5. Hip Hop magazines – Create a timeline that represents the order of original publication dates of the following Hip Hop Magazines: The Source - 1988, Rap Pages - 1991, Planet Black Magazine - 1995, The Fader, Vibe - 1993, XXL - 1998, and Rap-up Magazine – 2001, Yo! Raps Magazine – 2003</p>	<p><b>B.4.3 Read, write, and order whole numbers*, simple fractions (e.g., halves, fourths, tenths, unit fractions*) and commonly-used decimals (monetary units)</b></p>	<p>e. Graph proportional relationships in the form <math>y=kx</math> and describe characteristics of the graph.</p>
<p>6. Based on the following timeline, answer the questions below: 1970 – Afrika Bambaataa, founder of Hip Hop, starts to DJ.</p>	<p><b>A.4.3 Connect mathematical learning with other subjects,</b></p>	<p>f. In a proportional Relationship expressed as <math>y=kx</math>,</p>

<p>1971 – Graffiti and Breakin’ begin</p> <p>1975 – First DJ to scratch, DJ Grand Wizard Theodore I, at age 13</p> <p>1978 – Music industry coins the term “rap music”</p> <p>1979 – “Rappers Delight” released, hip hops first commercially released single</p> <p>1982 – Grandmaster Flash’s “The Message” is hip hop’s first Political Hip Hop song</p> <p>1984 – Russell Simmons forms Def Jam Records</p> <p>1987 – Public Enemy releases their first album</p> <p>1991 – first gangsta rap CD released</p> <p>1999 – Lauryn Hill is the first woman nominated for 10 Grammy awards.</p> <p>2004 – Hip Hop Summit registers 2 million youth voters</p> <p>2007 – Grammy Awards create Hip Hop category</p> <p>2007 – Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five - the first hip hop group to be inducted into The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame</p> <p>a. How many years were there between the release of “The Message” and Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five’s induction into The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame?</p> <p>b. How many years was hip hop around before the Grammy Award’s gave it its own musical category in the awards.</p> <p>c. How old was Hip Hop</p>	<p><b>personal experiences,</b></p> <p><b>current events, and</b></p> <p><b>personal interests</b></p> <p><b>B.4.5 In problem-solving</b></p> <p><b>situations involving whole</b></p> <p><b>numbers, select and</b></p> <p><b>efficiently use</b></p> <p><b>appropriate</b></p> <p><b>computational</b></p> <p><b>procedures</b></p>	<p>solve for x.</p>
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when Def Jam Records began?		
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As we met, I reminded the boys that hip hop can be used in school for any subject. Since math was a struggle for a couple of the boys, I decided that we work on the standards the boys were already studying. Here is the conversation about hip hop mathematics.

**Researcher:** Hello. We are going to work in the library today. I want to give you an activity in math using hip hop. You will work with your partner to do the first three questions. Let's look at question four. It refers to this book, *Hip Hop Street Curriculum* by Jawanza Kunjufu, page 34-35. I have the book. The first question is –You sell a million CDs at eighteen dollars. How do you make?

**MCMoney:** (chuckles). That's easy, eighteen million dollars.

**Researcher:** Oh really. Hold that thought. The second question is –distributors make fifty percent. How much do the distributors earn?

**Lil B:** Nine million.

**Researcher:** Is that your final answer.

**Lil B:** Yes ma'am.

**Researcher:** I really want to get you to thinking about what money is made or not made in being a hip hop or rap artist. Look at the next question. How much do you earn after distributor's take?

**Twinky:** You probably won't have much.

**Researcher:** We will look at the producer's take, studio and video production, and don't forget to pay taxes. Uncle Sam is going to get his money. Some other things to consider, how many people are in the group that will need to be paid?

**Babyface:** (sic) You want make no money.

**Researcher:** That's right. Remember the next time someone says they want to be a rapper, think about how much will they actually earn?

**MCMoney:** I just don't know. I like to make money, but it look like you won't make a lot of money. What if you sell a lot of CDs?

**Twinkey:** Man, you will have to sell a lot. Go platinum.

**Lil B:** Man, I like to rap and dance, but I ain't trying to be a rapper.

**Researcher:** I like this question because it makes you consider the reality of the music industry. I know you see the big cars and homes or cribs, the jewelry and the money in videos, reality television and movies. Do you know that is how some kids view hip hop culture? Now we are going to look at some positive aspects. Let's turn to the hip hop math activities on you cards. Work with your partner and answer the questions.

The students left my office with a new prospective after having a real lesson on the business aspects of the music industry, especially the hip hop and rap business. The students had a great interest in hip hop clothes. I promised the boys we would talk about some of the clothes and hip hop fashion designer at our next focus group session.

### Hip Hop Fashion Moguls

During our meeting on January 20, the students were introduced to the world of the hip hop industry and fashion. We talked about the various designers who were hip hop artists. The students were familiar with many hip hop fashion designers. They talked about designers including: Sean John by P. Diddy and Roca Wear by Jay Z. Students completed a marketing survey (Appendix I). The results of the marketing survey are:

- Students purchase sneakers often Sports
- Students purchase Nike Air Jordan's
- Students use the internet often for media outlet
- Students like new rappers (e.g. Plies, Lil Wayne)
- Students view Michael Jordan as favorite all time athlete

The next week, the students looked at the cultural impact of music on their parents. The boys focused on their parents and interviewed them to find out who were their favorite recording artists and musical influences of their time. We reviewed the parent interviews (Appendix J).

The students returned with their parent interviews:

**Researcher:** Hi guys, come in. How did it go with your parents?

**Twinkey:** I interviewed my grandmother.

**Researcher:** That's fine. It did not have to be with your parent.

**Lil B:** I interviewed my momma.

**Researcher:** Okay, good. Let's talk about the interview. I want you to talk to each other



about what your parents said.

**Babyface:** I want to go first.

**Researcher:** Well, I just want you all to have a conversation while I observe.

**Babyface:** I talk with my dad because I know he likes music. He said he would come and show us how to mix music.

**Researcher:** Really. I'll call him.

**Babyface:** I am serious. The music he said he like was Prince and Michael Jackson. He remembered his albums costing five dollars (\$5.00).

**MCMoney:** My momma listened to Michael Jackson, too. She liked to listen to Natalie Cole and The New Edition. Her momma listened to her music. She had albums and records. Albums were about \$5.00 and records about \$2.00.

**Twinkey:** My grandmother liked to listen to Patti LaBelle when she was a teenager. She said she listened to Al Green, Sam Cooke, and James Brown.

**Lil B:** (laughing) My momma liked Diane Ross and the Supremes and Smokey Robinson.

**MC Money:** My momma liked the Temptations and Four Tops, too.

**Babyface:** My daddy was in the band and he played the drums.

**Researcher:** You all of doing well. How did music influence your parents?

**Babyface:** My daddy said the songs were better. Not too much cussing. He was influenced to stay positive.

**Lil B:** My mom did not say how it influenced her.

**Twinkey:** My grandmother was not influenced by music. She played the piano. Her parents were very strict about what she listened to as a teenager. She was influenced by her parents and grandparents.

**Researcher:** Thank you for sharing your information. I hope this helped you to better understand how your parents felt as teenager. I want to share my responses to some of the questions on the parent interview. When I was a teenager, I was in music class in my junior high school, which the teacher exposed me to all types of music. My daddy limited me to listening to gospel only so being in music class helped me to hear other types of music. I was in the band so I got to play all kinds of music.

**MCMoney:** What did you play?

**Researcher:** Clarinet. Then I learned how to play the Alto Saxophone. It was easy to pick up. By the time I got to high school, I played the sax for marching band and the jazz band. I played the clarinet during concert season.

**Lil B:** You had to listen to gospel at home. Yes, my daddy was a preacher and any other music was not allowed. So I did not buy any music other than gospel. Thank goodness, I had another outlet—band.

**Boys:** (shaking their heads and nodding)

**Researcher:** This will end our session. Time surely flies.

For the next three months, the students met twice a week. As we met, I would have the students to talk about who they liked as their favorite male and female rapper as well as favorite athlete. For Black History Month in February, the students worked on researching their favorite hip hop /rapper artist. The purpose of this assignment was to

have students utilize their research skills while finding out information about their favorite performer. Each student selected a hip hop/rap artist to research. Each boy provided me with the name of his favorite artist whom he was going to study. The boys began to work on their culminating project, a three month long study of the hip hop artist creating a PowerPoint Presentation.

In March, the winds blew fiercely when Rock Solid left the group. I felt the loss of such an artistic student. By the second week, Big Dre (who initially was not allowed to participate) joined the group with his grandmother's blessings. Big Dre's thought-provoking questions and thoughts about hip hop and rap brought new, fresh ideas to the group. We spent some time updating Big Dre on what we had done in the earlier months.

To celebrate Women's History Month, the students participated in a focus group discussion on the significance of the female hip hop and rap stars. The students conducted an in-depth study of the contributions of selected female artists. Students created a poster of the female artists showcasing the talents and significant contributions as well as create a game based on the contributions of their female artist I wanted to learn more about why they selected various rappers and athletes. The students created a match game using the information about their favorite female artist. The students worked in pairs, which I joined in to participate in the activity.

During April, the students researched their favorite athlete and created a Hip Hop Hall of Fame project. The students had to justify why a particular athlete earned the award and selection into the Hip Hop Hall of Fame.

The table below will give the students' favorite male hip hop star, female hip hop star and athlete.

TABLE 7

*Favorite Hip Hop Artists and Favorite Athletes*

Student	Favorite Male Artist	Female Artist	Favorite Athlete
MC Money	Young Jeezy.	Foxy Brown	The Rock
Twinkey	Eminem	Missy Elliot	
Lil' B	Plies	Mary J. Blige	LeBron James
Babyface	Tupac	Queen Latifah	Jackie Robinson
Big Dre	Lil' Wayne	Eve	Dwayne Wade

For the last two weeks of school, the students worked independently to make sure the PowerPoint Presentation was ready for the reveal. The boys were given a series of questions to answer about their rapper/hip hop artist. The information the students gathered related to the following: childhood, adult life, education, music, accomplishments and other significant facts.

The discussion...

**Researcher:** Hi boys, I want to review what you have done on your PowerPoint. I know you have been working in the library twice a week. I appreciate Mrs. Evans for letting us go in to use the media center.

**MC Money:** I have some of my presentation. I am doing it on Young Jeezy. I am trying to look for pictures and some of his music.

**Researcher:** (taking out the thumbdrive). Let's pull up your project. I want you all to look at each other's work and critique it. Remember this is a work in progress. Do not rush. Take a time and find out all you can about your

person. Okay, guys what do you like and what do suggest he does to make this better?

**Lil B:** I like the pictures he has. But check your spelling. Use spell check.

**Babyface:** Find out more about his childhood.

**Twinkey:** I like your style. You may want to change the background from red. It is hard to see your words.

**Researcher:** I would suggest you find as many interesting and important facts about Young Jeezy. Okay, who is next?

**Lil B:** (raising hand) I am working on Plies. See there is not a lot about him.

**MC Money:** He has not been out long. Maybe three years.

**Twinkey:** You have nice pictures, but get more facts about his childhood. Like find out where he went to school.

**Researcher:** I would like to see more information too. I know there may be limited info, but check more websites.

**Big Dre:** I am going to do Lil' Wayne.

**Lil B:** That looks good.

**Babyface:** You have good information and like your style.

**Researcher:** You have done well to have just joined the group.

**Babyface:** I did my presentation on Tupac. I found a lot of info on him.

**Researcher:** You should be able to find out a lot of interesting info about his family life.

**MCMoney:** Look like you just copied off the internet.

**Researcher:** Please look at the info and put it in your own words. Do not just cut and paste. I want your own words and ideas.

**Twinkey:** I am doing Eninem. I find out some great info on him. Did anybody see his movie, "Eight Mile"?

**MCMoney:** I saw it.

**Babyface:** Me too.

**Big Dre:** I saw it too.

**Lil B:** It is kinda of old now.

**Babyface:** This is the best one.

**Researcher:** Looks like you are ready. Everyone look at his format. You do not have the exact same style, but he has researched a lot on Eninem. Even his pictures look great. The color chosen is perfect for a PowerPoint. Now when you chose your font and color, be sure that your audience can see it clearly. Now tomorrow, we are scheduled to go the library. I am going to order the pizza and then we will get to work. When the pizza arrives, we will take a break.

**MC Money:** Mrs. Spikes, we have our own money for the pizza.

**Researcher:** Okay, that will be fine. May I have some of the pizza (laughing)?

**MCMoney:** Why of course. That's the least we can do.

**Boys:** Yeah!

**Lil B.:** We will give you some pizza.

**Researcher:** Where do you want to order?

**Boys:** Little Caesar's.

**Researcher:** I will order two large for Friday afternoon. Okay, see you later. Go back to class. I will e-mail your teachers to send you at 12:30.

The students critiqued each other's projects before presenting them to me. I met with each student individually to review the project. The students worked on selecting music to include with their PowerPoint. The PowerPoint presentations developed by the students were the end of the study project for the boys' group.

As we continued our session, the boys were interviewed using the following questions:

1. In your opinion, what is the most important aspect of hip hop music?
2. Who in your mind is the best rapper currently making albums?
3. There is a lot made of keepin' it real" in hip hop, what does that mean to you? Do you think/feel that rappers keep it real?
4. If a music executive wanted to offer you an opportunity to become the next hip hop or rap star, what would you do?
5. Hip hop is known for its realism about life. What do you think is the greatest problem facing our generation in the United States? World? (e.g. Economy, Terrorism, Drugs, Family Breakdown, Diseases, Hunger, Global Warming, etc.).
6. Tell me what you have learned about the Civil Rights Movement (e.g. Martin Luther King, Jr., Rosa Parks, March on Washington, boycott, desegregation, etc).

Do you think hip hop represents today's civil rights movement? Why or Why not?

As I interviewed the boys, the common themes found among their responses. The responses were as follows:

Question 1: money, fans, making albums, being able to express yourself

Question 2: Plies, 50 cent

Question 3: (part 1) Saying something that is true, not making up lies (part 2) yes, some of the rappers keep it real

Question 4: Yes. I want to finish school. Yes, but I want to get an education.

Question 5: Economy, Drugs, and Terrorism (this what the parents discuss and what is on T.V.

Question 6: Civil Rights are the rights for black people. Helps end racism. Brings people together.

After we ended the session, the boys talked about the civil rights movement and how it impacted their race. I told the students we would talk about civil rights and hip hop and compare and contrast the two movements in our next and final meeting. As always the boys wanted to have pizza. I agreed to order pizza from Godfather's Pizza for our last meeting.

### The Civil Rights Movement and Hip Hop Movement

To begin the discussion on the role of Civil Rights Movement and hip hop on civil liberties, I introduced the book *Mine Eyes Have Seen: Bearing Witness to the Struggle for Civil Rights* and an excerpt of Russell Simmons' Hip Hop Summit Action Network. The students listened to facts about the Civil Rights Movement and Hip Hop Movement. The students compared and contrasted the two movements. This led into discussion on how the two movements have improved the lives of humanity. The boys expounded on the views of the two movements including a discussion of the key figures of each movement.



As we began, the students talked about the Civil Rights Movement as being important to all people. The aim of the movement, which is historically significant, was a reform movement outlawing racial and social unrest of the 1950s. This movement was organized by many groups, such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) AND the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). While the times were very intense, a lot of the protests related to fundamental issues of freedom, economic and social equality.

With the Civil Rights Movement, there were the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, banning discrimination based on race, color, religion in employment opportunities and public facilities as well as the Voting Rights of 1965, providing the right to vote, just to name a couple. Many leaders emerged during the Civil Rights Movement, most notable, Martin Luther King, Jr. with his nonviolent approach to social and racial injustices. It was a common practice for youth participation in marches and sit-ins to express their discontent with the social climate, few employment opportunities, and educational inequality. Because of the significance of music in African American culture, I noted during the Civil Rights Movement and the Vietnam War Era of the 1960s and even the 1970s, soul and blues singers and disco musicians dominated the culture. Many artists used their music to influence the minds of young people. The political and social injustices of the 1980s and 1990s served as the backdrop for bands that played rock 'n' roll, rhythm and blues and hip hop and rap. *Has hip hop emerged as the new civil rights movement ?*

Hip hop has a considerable impact on social and political issues since its inception in the late 1970s. Initially, hip hop culture as a movement has reflected the social,

political, economic injustices of Black and Latino youth. In 1979 to 1982, hip hop existed as a performance-based art form, thriving in clubs in and around the South Bronx. A year later, hip hop artists, such as Run D.M.C., L.L. Cool J (my favorite rapper) began to appeal to the masses. Other groups emerged, such as black nationalists (Public Enemy) and gangsta rap (e.g. Eazy E), who both rose to prominence in the 1980s, with the use of dichotomous cultural narratives (Dimitriadis,2001).

In recent years, the Hip Hop Summit Action Network (HSAN) began a movement to foster initiatives aimed at engaging the Hip Hop generation in community development issues related to equal access to quality public education and literacy, freedom of speech, voter education, economic advancement, and youth leadership development. Some hip hop artists, such as Jay Z, Russell Simmons, and P. Diddy have become an entrepreneurial icon.

Before we begin our session, the students and I talked about how this was the last session for our group. I asked the boys to talk about what they had learned. The boys wanted to continue to come for group sessions for the summer. I told them I would to give some time to come up with an idea of when we could meet.

Listen to the focus group's discussion.

**Researcher:** Hi boys, I cannot wait to get started on today's topic. Some of you have been wanting to talk about the hip hop and the civil rights movement.

**Twinkey:** Yeah. We have been doing a project in our class.

**Researcher:** Oh really. That's great. What are you doing?

**Twinkey:** We are working in a group to research people who helped with the civil rights movement.

**Researcher:** I love it. Now, what I have for you to do is just to compare and contrast the Civil Rights Movement and the Hip Hop Movement. Let's look at the book I have. It is t called *Mine Eyes Have Seen: Bearing Witness to the Struggle for Civil Rights*. Also, I have a portion of the Hip Hop Summit. I want you to tell what is unique to each of the movement and then will look at the commonalities among the two. Are you ready?

**Boys:** Yes, ma'am.

**Researcher:** Maybe you can work in teams and then report your findings.

As the boys worked, they were very involved in what they doing. The boys brainstorm to write down anything that related to the civil rights and hip hop movement.

TABLE 8

*Civil Rights Versus Hip Hop Movement*

The boys completed the assignment and gave the following info:

Civil Rights Movement	Hip Hop Movement	Commonalities
		-Civil Rights and Hip Hop Movement
Martin Luther King, Jr.	Afrika Bambaataa	Changed the world
Rosa Parks	World freedom	Voting rights
Rights for everybody	Blacks /Latinos	Freedom
1950's	Bronx, NY  Last 1979 to 1980's	

This is the conversation for our last session.

**Researcher:** Guys, this has been wonderful. I want you to know that you have made this so easy.

**MCMoney:** This has been a lot of fun. Can we do this in the summer?

**Lil B:** Can we Mrs. Spikes? My daddy would not mind.

**Twinkey:** My brother and I will be in Florida for the whole summer. We will be leaving on Friday.

**Big Dre:** We go every summer to be with our family.

**Brandon:** I can meet every day, but Fridays.

**Researcher:** Let me check my schedule. I would have to get permission to continue during the summer. I will let you know.

(phone rangs)

**Research:** (answers phone) Okay. Thanks! The pizza is ready.

**Lil B:** Yes!

**Researcher:** Come on guys, let's go eat.

As we ate and reflected over the last few months, I was thrilled that the boys wanted to continue with our sessions. I knew that summer vacation would be coming in a couple weeks, and I would need to get approval to work with the students. At this point, three of the five boys could participate so I had to come up with some interesting activities.

As I sat in my office that afternoon, I thought about the initial challenges I had getting started, I had an incredible experience working with the boys. I wanted to meet in the summer, but I had to work up to two weeks after the students. The students had a plan. They decided to come up to media center and begin an independent project. The

boys got permission from their parents and the media specialist to use the computer for their research. While the boys came about three days, I was thrilled that they took the initiative to do a research project on new hip hop artists. The boys wanted to know if they could continue the groups in seventh grade. In two more years these boys will be off to high school. I plan to keep up with them even after they leave our school and move on the high school.

In the next chapter I will give my findings and final conclusions.

## CHAPTER 5

### IS HIP HOP HERE TO STAY

This study was an exploration into the experience of six African American males and the impact of the hip hop culture on their lives. The study explored how hip hop culture, especially fashion, language and music influenced their lives.

I utilized the ethnographic inquiry with an emphasis on critical race theory. This perspective allowed me to consider the experience hip hop and rap through the cultural lens of young Black males. This study afforded me the opportunity to embrace a culture that has transcended the lives of young people from diverse ethnicity. I have one rhetorical question, is hip hop here to stay?

#### The Findings

The findings of this study indicate that hip hop, for the African American male; can be used to address the educational, societal, and cultural needs of our young people. This researcher addressed several questions. 1) How do African American students understand /perceive hip hop in the context of academics? 2) How does hip hop and rap address the societal issues of AA students? 3) How can hip hop and rap be used in a positive way to impact the cultural needs of students, especially AA male students?

Through the journal writings, as well as during observations, interviews, and focus groups I conducted, several common threads emerged.

I found five common threads:

- Students want hip hop and rap incorporated into classroom instruction (Finding1)
- Students were influenced by the media use of hip hop and rap (Finding 2)
- Students embrace the fashion and style of hip hop culture (Finding 3).

- Students identify with the music of hip hop and rap stars (Finding 4)
- Students view hip hop and rap as vehicle to address some societal issues such as education, crime and violence and equality (Finding 5)

Students want hip hop and rap incorporated into classroom instruction (Finding 1). Hip hop and rap in the classroom was a high interest of the students. To test the knowledge of the students, I administered a Vocabulary Quiz (see Appendix F). The students had a great command of the hip hop vocabulary. Surprisingly, the students did well with ten out of eleven vocabulary words. Only one student knew the definition of the word *battle*, which meant to rap off or dance off. The students used appropriate language during the group sessions. When asked to discuss a topic relating to hip hop the students were familiar with the hip hop terminology. I learned quite a number of new phrases and words from the students.

The students eagerly worked on any assignment that related to using hip hop and rap. The hip hop math activities were culturally relevant for the boys to see the significance of math in the hip hop and rap industry. One homework assignment required that the boys turn poetry into their favorite rap beat. The boys all agreed that sometimes students do not want to do homework. While none of them seem to hate homework, the commonality among the boys was that classwork and homework should be meaningful and fun.

The boys discussed the fact that the teachers did give meaningful assignments; however, they enjoyed when rap and hip hop were a part of the work and activities I gave them. The research projects were taken very seriously and conducted well by most students except one student. One student had difficulty with understanding how to

conduct a research project. I reviewed the expectations, and he was able to get on the right track. The boys did a wonderful job with their PowerPoint presentations on the hip hop and rap artists. Many students are utilizing the media more than textbooks; therefore, it is crucial that educators find ways to incorporate media, such as newspaper, TV, the newspaper, and popular music into the classrooms (McCarthy, 1993).

Students were influenced by the media use of hip hop and rap (Finding 2). Students are influenced by the media's use of hip hop and rap artists in advertising, commercials and previews of television and cable shows. Students reviewed ads and discussed how the influences of hip hop are used in ads. Students equate hip hop culture with having money, fancy cars, big houses (cribs), designer clothes, jewelry (bling bling).

Today, youth are inundated with the media's focus on hip hop and rap as a vehicle to sell products on a global level. Many times the faces of hip hop and rap stars are endorsing the products (Kitwana, 2002).

Students embrace the fashion and style of hip hop culture (Finding 3). After a discussion on the media impact in their lives, the students shared their like fashion and style preference. The students were able to discuss the clothing that they considered were hip hop fashion. While I was surprised to see that most of the boys were not self-absorbed with hip hop fashion as some would expect, the students did show some interest in the hip hop fashion and style, particularly in footwear. The boys purchased Michael Jordan's shoes, Air Jordan, and designs by hip hop moguls (e.g. Sean John, Roca wear, Phat Farm).

Hip hop generation students in grades kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade were required to have a new look entering school for the school year 2007-2008. The school



district adopted a dress code that would be mandatory for all elementary, middle school and high school students. The rationale was that students would wear ‘academic uniforms’ and focus more on academic achievement. There was even a reference to maintaining safety. No more Roca Wear, Sean John, or Phat Farm for the hip hop generation. I believed this was s a good idea to have “academic uniforms”; however, many opinions have surfaced regarding the issues of identity and individuality. Do all students need to conform to the dress code and have uniformity throughout the schools? Conformity or Uniformity? Reynolds (2003) argues:

Popular culture is not only about media; it is also about identity commodity (real brand) and its connection with the schools. Thus, not only do students at primary, secondary, and postsecondary levels of education get much of their education in popular culture context but also the schools and universities in their universities in their structure and curriculum evidence the immersion into the brand-named order. (p. 26)

The significance of talking about fashion was relevant to the students because they have to wear school uniforms. Students preferred not to wear uniforms and gladly wore hip hop fashions when the principal allowed them to do so. During the discussion on fashion, the boys asked about wearing hip hop fashion for our next session. Since our school district has a systemwide uniform policy, I could not grant their wish. I suggested that they ask the principal for a “dress down” day.

The following week, the principal allowed only the middle school students to have a “dress down” day. Although it was not one of our scheduled sessions, the boys came by my office to show me how they were dressed. I saw fashions such as Sean John,

South Pole, and shoe by Nike. Youth today seeking identity, language and fashion attach themselves to products, whether it is clothes, shoes, movies, or popular rap stars (Kitwana, 2000).

Students identify with the music of hip hop and rap stars (Finding 4). The students were given a survey to complete to share the names of the most popular hip hop and rap artists. The students like many of the new rappers. The most popular rapper among the students was Plies, Lil Wayne and 50 cent. The most well-known of the older rappers among the students are Tupac, Eminem, Wyclef Jean, Mos Def, and Run DMC.

Interestingly, when students selected a hip hop or rap artist for research, three students selected young hip hoppers or rappers and two students chose older, more established rappers. The students selected to study the following rappers: Tupac, Plies, Eminem, Young Jeezy and Lil' Wayne. As the students worked on their research, they discovered that hip hop artists or rappers have used their music as a platform to have their voices heard. Hip hop and rap gives a voice to young Black males who have struggled with finding their place and space in mainstream America.

Students view hip hop and rap as vehicle to address some societal issues such as education, crime and violence and equality (Finding 5). More than often, the students would discuss topics such as violence, economics, education, gender and racial equality. The boys would often come to the focus group with their agenda and topics for discussion. Most times I was so focused on what I wanted to do that I would not allow the boys to discuss their topics.

After two sessions, I soon realized that gender and racial equality was a hot topic. Two of the students shared a story about going into a neighborhood store and being

followed by the store owner/manager. Another student shared a story about being stopped on his bike by a local law enforcement officer. To make it more interesting, we talked about how hip hop and rap artist deals with issues such as race, poverty, crime and violence, voting rights, civil rights and so on.

The students compared and contrasted the hip hop and civil rights movements. This led into the discussion on how the two movements have improved the lives of humanity. The boys expounded on the views of the two movements including the key figures of each movement.

#### IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHERS AND ADMINISTRATORS

After the observations, audio taped interviews, focus group discussions and individual projects were completed, I analyzed whether or not this study influenced or had a significant impact on the cultural, social, and educational needs of the students. I uncovered important implications for teachers and administrators:

- The students want popular culture, especially hip hop and rap to be a part of their school experiences;
- The students are aware of the media and hip hop and rap collaborations to advertise to a youthful audience;
- The students want to use hip hop and rap as a vehicle to raise awareness about societal ills, such as poverty, poor education, gender and racial inequality, crime and violence.

As a fifth grade science teacher, I recall using a local hip hop rapper's name for a science lesson. Savannah native Jason "Camouflage" Johnson was a young, gifted, and Black rapper. During a lesson on animal adaptation, I told the students that we would

be discussing Camouflage (camouflage). The students were familiar with the rapper and his songs and some students had attended one of his concerts in the park. One of the students shared he was related to the rapper and would later bring me an autographed copy of Camouflage's picture to place on our "Wall of Fame." I told the students, "Let's talk about another camouflage."

I would like to say that the students recognized that the difference in spelling and had a lesson on homophones. No, but they were a captive audience on camouflage. However, we did explore why his name may have had significance. As I recalled every student did well on their explanation of the word camouflage. The reference to the rapper, Camouflage made the science lesson meaningful and relevant to my students.

A year later, unfortunately, like many other rappers, Tupac Shakur or Christopher "Biggie Smalls" Wallace, this upcoming rapper was gunned down outside his recording studio. It was relevant to the lives of the students because it happened in their community. It was relevant because they knew the rapper. It was relevant because he was so young. I would later learn that this student had been a student at a school in which I once taught.

The next school year I mentioned Camouflage and the students remembered the rapper. Again the students were actively engaged in science, but they wanted to talk about the tragic end to this rising rap star. During the discussion, I was reminded that we had a student in my fifth grade class whose parents had established a gospel rap group called "Sons of God." My student was one of three members of the group.

The knowledge of having a rapper in the class created quite a discussion for class. This student was an honor roll student whose parents stayed on top of his academics. The parents were no strangers because I had the pleasure of teaching their eldest child three years earlier.

Because hip hop and rap were very popular, the parents met with me to discuss their child's work and the upcoming tour that the student would be having. It was exciting, but I was very concerned that he would fall behind in his studies. The parents reassured me that he would keep up classwork. The student was gone for a week, but when he returned he shared his experiences with the class. More importantly, he turned in his assignments. His mother was adamant about his school work being central to his success. She emphatically told me in the presence of her child, "If your grades drop, your rap career is over." I was so elated that I gave her a hug.

As the year ended we were given a special surprise from the parents. The principal allowed the group to give a performance for our entire fifth grade student body on the last day of school. As the students taught me to say, "The concert was off the chain." Please interpret.

As an assistant principal, I entered one of our fifth grade classes to do a teacher observation. As I recalled this novice teacher was using pop culture to introduce a reading lesson on great singers by connecting the past, present, and future. She mentioned the various genre of music (country, rock and roll, rhythm and blues, jazz, and classical, etc.) and had students to study singers, such as Ella Fitzgerald, Ray Charles, Willie Nelson, and Billie Holliday as well as write their own songs. I became fascinated with her delivery because ordinarily this class often presented her with discipline problems.

Although her class consisted of students who heralded themselves as part of the hip hop generation, she captured their attention by asking them about some of their favorite recording artists. Most students gave the name of hip hop recording artists. As I reflect to that lesson on that day; the students were primarily African American males with their share of discipline issues. I am not sure what happened before or after that day, but on this day the students were actively engaged. These students seem to have found the lesson relevant to their lives, their identity, their language, and style. As I watched this novice teacher's lesson unfold, I pondered the question, does popular culture, such as hip hop culture have a place in schools, colleges, and universities and the workplace? Watkins notes, "There is a perception, that because of their academic standing, hip hop scholars are disconnected from hip hop" (p. 246). Watkins asserts, "Major challenge scholars interested in hip hop face is how to develop a critical vocabulary and assessment of hip hop that earns them respect in two seemingly opposed worlds: academe and pop culture" (p.246).

As an administrator, I welcome the idea of using culturally responsive pedagogy and culturally relevant curriculum to enhance students' lives academically, socially and culturally. It is important that I too support teachers emotionally, physically and financially in this endeavor.

### Shout Out to Hip Hop Culture

Hip Hop's journey from the cultural margins to the cultural mainstream marks a pivotal moment in American history (Watkins, 2005). Born out of traditional continental African music, American jazz, the blues, and urban life, hip-hop has become an international cultural movement that has reshaped the musical tastes, fashion styles, and

language formation of millions of young people throughout the world (Weaver, 2005, p. 21). For future implications, I will explore three essential questions: What scholarly works support the use of hip hop culture in curriculum studies? When and how did hip hop culture and rap become a vital part of the African American culture? How can hip hop and rap be used as culturally responsive pedagogy?

### Hip Hop Culture and Curriculum Studies

No subject has made its mark on academia like hip hop. Many colleges and universities have embraced the music industry, youth culture, and the world of politics as part of higher education; however, the hip hop culture has made a great impact on scholarly work (Watkins, 2000). In my pursuit of a graduate degree in the Curriculum Studies, I have become engrossed in cultural studies. Cultural studies with its origin at the University of Birmingham, was a rite of passage for the development of youth subcultures (McRobbie, 2000). One youth subculture that has created high interest is popular culture or pop culture. Pop culture has played a vital role in the lives of African American students since the early 1970's with the advent of the hip hop movement. With key figures, such as Afrika Bambaataa and DJ Kool Herc, the hip hop movement became a dominant force in the lives of American youth, especially Black and Latino youth. The initial focus of the hip hop movement was on peace, unity, and self expression. In short, the hip hop movement was a voice for African Americans and Hispanic youth to express themselves through music, dance, art and language.

As the hip hop culture was educating our youth about cultural unity through dance and the arts, our education system was ill- prepared for educating the youth of

African American and Hispanic cultures. Meanwhile, Critical Race Theorists like Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman, mainly involved in racial justice in the mid 1970s, were preparing to address other issues, such as race relations, political, social justice and education. As the 80's decade began, the achievement gap between White and minority groups was widening and need for equal educational opportunities was on the rise. Critical race theorists were taking a critical view of academic achievement testing, school discipline and curriculum, just to name a few.

In the 1980s education reform was most prevalent than ever before. During the Reagan Administration the presumably 'lax' condition of American schools was alleged to place the nation 'at risk' (Pinar, 2004). As the world was changing, African American and Hispanic youth were encompassing graffiti and breakdancing, rap music and fashion. Hip hop became the dominant cultural movement in the 1980s.

In 1982, I graduated from high school and well on my way to attend Savannah State College, a historically black college. With my parents' blessings and financial support, I was prepared to enter the world of higher education, academia, and young adulthood. During this time, *The Cosby Show*, one of my favorite pastimes, created the spin off *A Different World*, which aired in the mid 1980's was culturally relevant to my life. There was very little cultural diversity in the spin-off show. It was basically about a fictitious historically black college named "Hillman" where the students were making a transition from high school to college life. That show was one of my must see television shows.

While attending Savannah State, my college life mirrored what I saw on *A Different World*. I identified with many of the topics that the show addressed. The topics



of race relations, class issues, capitalisms, recession, corporate, foreign policy, and Reaganomics using humor were very popular. This show was popular culture for many Americans, particularly African American youth. As the youth of that decade would note... it was *hip* and *fresh*.

Gail Thompson's study of high school students in California gave insight into the educational experiences of African American students. Thompson (2002) remarks, "a culturally relevant curriculum is extremely important to self-esteem, identity development. African American students need to see people who are from their own culture and background reflected in the texts that they read ongoing basis. Moreover, they need a curriculum that is connected to the real world in which they work" (p. 62).

Twenty years and three college degrees later, I enrolled in Georgia Southern University's doctoral program majoring in Curriculum Studies. Curriculum Studies have helped me to view curriculum theory and evolve in a way that I believe will benefit me professionally and personally. Over the last four years, I realize that curriculum studies is a truly a "different world."

### Hip Hop Culture and Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

"Pedagogy means, in the original Greek sense, leading children. Teaching is truly pedagogic if the leading grows out of this care that inevitably is filled with the good of care. Teaching, then, is a tactful leading that knows and follows the pedagogic good of a caring situation (Pinar& Irwin, 2004).

Popular culture may be used to the curriculum relevant to the lives of people. Typically, I have used popular culture, especially hip hop music or film to teach. Gay argues :

The fundamental aim of culturally responsive pedagogy is to empower ethnically diverse students through academic success, cultural affiliation, and personal efficacy. Knowledge in the form of curriculum content is central to this empowerment. To be effective, this knowledge must be accessible to the students and connect to their lives and experiences outside of school. (Gay, 111)

About seven years ago, I was teaching fifth grade at a local elementary school. During this time, the students were highly interested in hip hop clothing and music. The students were not mandated to wear uniforms; therefore, hip hop fashions were prevalent, especially among the older students. Students were into the rap music as well.

As I prepared to wrap up the school year, my last year as a classroom teacher (I was promoted to an assistant principal position at another school), I pondered this question: Will teachers compete with or embrace pop culture, especially rap and hip hop culture to inspire students to learn?

First as a teacher and now as an administrator, I feel that teachers will have to find a way to incorporate popular culture, such as hip hop culture into their curriculum. In Weaver's question "Why are kids so uninterested in what I spent a lifetime preparing to give them"? Slattery (1999) remarks, "A curriculum that does not make connections to the art, music, literature, sciences, and other artifacts of the human community is devoid of meaning and purpose" (p. 215). I believe curriculum must be culturally relevant ( Gay, 2000; Thompson, 2002), make "connections to subjects" to have meaning (Slattery),

connect to “lived experiences” (Pinar, 2004) and have ethnic and cultural diversity (Gay, 2000). I have watched the effects of hip hop on the youth culture of today. While hip hop has provided a vehicle in which young people may freely express themselves, I want to use it provide a “culturally relevant curriculum that connect to subjects and lived experiences while incorporating ethnic and cultural diversity”.

Popular culture has had significance in the lives of young people for decades. Reflecting on the late 1970's and early 1980's, I watched the television shows, such as *Welcome Back Kotter*, *Happy Days* and *Good Times*. Each show had a popular tune and I knew the lyrics of each of these cultural icons. With much anticipation of the days of summer, I recall how I first heard a popular rap entitled ‘Rapper’s Delight’ by the Sugar Hill Gang. It took talent to remember and say the lyrics just right.

After watching a segment on Cathy Hughes’s T.V. One in which Russell Simmons was a guest, I was impressed that Simmons was among three top Black Music Moguls with Jay Z and P. Diddy rounding out the top three. Many of our students view these men as role models or someone to emulate. Despite racial and social barriers, these men have used their creativity and resources to invest into a profitable business--hip hop culture. These men have gone beyond the music industry to incorporate other business ventures--owning professional ball teams, clothing lines, record companies. Is hip hop here to stay?

Hip hop culture with its global appeal is here to stay. Hip hop culture with its power to transcend race and cultures is here to stay. Hip hop Hip hop culture, despite its critics, is here to stay.

## EPILOGUE

Recently, the boys stopped by office after their lunchtime to ask about continuing the hip hop project. The conversation started out as usual. “ Mrs. Spikes, when will we get started again?” asked Lil B. He appeared to be the spokesperson for the group. Amazed by the visit from the boys, I smiled and responded with “ we will see” . Knowing how difficult it was for us to get started, I was not sure if I could continue with the boys. Without failure, whenever one of the boys would see, I would be asked the same questions when will we start? Finally, I told the boys, with the approval of parents and teachers, we could meet once a week. The boys enjoyed the study so much that they enlisted other students to join.

In subsequent meetings, the boys brought in their own ideas for the hip hop project. After the CRCT ended, I told the boys we would develop a project that would be more school and community based. The boys asked that I bring in a rapper for one of their sessions. I told the boys I would look into finding a local rapper. In January, after attending the Honda Battle of the Bands, I met a Savannah rapper known as Blaque, who agreed to come meet the boys.

Reflecting on my first meeting with the boys, I had no idea how this research would unfold. I knew the challenges would be many, but the greatest challenge has been to get the boys to stop coming by to ask me about continuing. Above all, they want to include other students, attending our school and attending other students. Needless to say, it is my goal to continue with the boys and develop a follow up study regarding what is relevant pedagogy(Gay,2000 ; Ladson-Billings,2003). What I want to do is simply. I will

bring in a local rapper to meet with the boys during some of our sessions. The boys will continue to create their own songs and perform their raps.

I have been privilege to work with some of the wonderful students over the past year. I know who they like in hip hop and rap as well as sports. I met with them every week, so they shared much of their daily lives with me. Now that my research has concluded, the boys do not want to stop. I am very busy with many administrative duties so my time is well spent during the day. I promised the students I would come up with a plan that would be suitable to do a follow up until they reach eighth grade.

It is my desire work with my “boyz” until they finish high school. Since most of the students were into sports, so I expect to find some of them on some sports team, football, basketball, baseball, wrestling or some other sport. I will be witnessing hip hop in its finest hour.

Thinking back five years ago to the night my husband, Eddie and I attended the basketball game in Macon, Georgia, I watched the game and thought is hip hop here to stay? The students continued to move during the entire game. During halftime, there was a mad rush to the concession stands. More students came into the arena. More hip hop fashions modeled. More hip hop music was being played. There were four games scheduled that evening. The last game ended with our favorite team winning that night. Whether we wanted to be or not, we were experiencing a part of the hip hop culture that night. What a night!!!

Since that time my dear Eddie has passed away. He was an avid sports fan of professional, collegiate and prep teams. He was an awesome basketball coach, affectionately known as “Coach Phil Jackson” of the Bulls and Lakers fame. I did not

want to attend any games for awhile. However, last basketball season, I ran into my high school classmate and friend, BJ at a local high school basketball game. It was so exciting to see him. After exchanging hugs and hellos, BJ and I talked about the huge crowd of kids and trying to find seating. This was not at a college or pro game, but a high school basketball game. As we looked for our seats, I knew it would be much of the same, students talking their own language, wearing their fashions, listening to music from iPods, and talking and texting on cell phones.

BJ and I reminisced about our days as children growing up and the fun things that we experienced. We noticed that some of the fashions were really the same fashions that we wore thirty-five years earlier when we were high school students. We talked about the music of our times and how the lyrics were significant. We talked about how old we were getting, yet we could still connect to the kids of this generation. We talked about schools and education for students today. We even laughed when we thought about the hip hop terms used by the kids of today. We did not want to lose touch with Generation Next, but knew we were now the age that our parents were at that time when we, as youth, thought our words were hip. That night was incredible, just like the one in Macon, Georgia years earlier.

Just picture this..... The clothes were still “hip,” but more fashionable. I saw new fashions ranging from Apple Bottoms jeans to Roca Wear jeans. I heard music of new artists from Souljah Boy to Ne-yo. I saw tech savvy young people using iPhones and blackberries. Students were walking into the arena. Students were congregating outside the arena. Long lines began forming at the concession stands. Students were talking on cell phones. Students were showing off their latest fashions.

I must say, I have become a little more fashion savvy since my voyage into the hip hop culture. I sported my stretched denim jeans with a blazer, fly shirt, with peek toe high heels. I paid dearly for feet being so sore, but I was fashionable. BJ was wearing a Nike warm-up with his Nike shoes. Although he was not into the hip hop clothes, he was definitely big on athletic gear.

This time I did not listen in on the conversation of the hip hop culture. I was so busy talking with a good friend about our days as in the hip hop culture listening to Rapper's Delight and Kurtis Blow. My friend was now a jazz connoisseur and invited me to a jazz concert. I accepted. We caught up with what we were doing at this time in our lives. He shared that he was starting another business venture. I told him I was working on my EDD in curriculum studies. I told him I was interested in working with male students using hip hop. He told me if I needed some students to work with, he has a football team of young males who would love it. I told him I appreciated the offer and I would let him know.

As we looked back at the game, I soon realized that neither of the teams playing were our alma mater. Sadly our school had not been a high school state winner for years. On a positive note, that will soon change. Surprisingly, he and I were cheering for opposite teams. This made the game more interesting and exciting.

I sat there with my good friend; I knew hip hop was here to stay. Whether someone is a Baby Boomer, Generation X or Generation Next, we all live in the hip hop culture. Embrace it or disgrace at it, we must face it, hip hop is here to stay.

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## APPENDIX A

### INFORMED CONSENT

#### COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

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#### DEPARTMENT OF CURRICULUM, FOUNDATIONS AND READING

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#### INFORMED CONSENT

1. Identify who you are, your relationship to Georgia Southern University, and why you are doing this research. My name is Rose C. Spikes. I am currently the vice principal at Hesse Elementary and I am a student at Georgia Southern University working on my Doctor of Education Degree. I am interesting in finding out how to use hip hop culture in a positive manner to promote academic achievement. The purpose of this research is to determine how hip hop culture can be used to promote higher academic achievement in African American male students.
2. Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this research is to examine how hip hop cultures can be used to effect the academic achievement of African American male students. This study will investigate whether hip hop culture can be used to address the curricular needs of sixth grade male students.
3. Procedures to be followed: Your child will be asked to participate in curriculum activities incorporating hip hop and rap. Your child will be asked to take a survey on hip hop culture.
4. Discomforts and Risks: There are no risks in participating in this research beyond those experienced in everyday life.
5. Benefits:
  - a. The benefits to participants include ways to improve student achievement.

- b. The benefits to society include promoting higher academic achievement among students, especially African American male students.
6. Duration/Time: It will take about 2 hours a week for the student to participate in the hip hop culture study. The study will be conducted for 5 months.
7. Statement of Confidentiality: Only the primary investigator and the research advisor, will know the identity of your child. If this research is published, no information that would identify the student will be written.
8. Right to Ask Questions: Participants have the right to ask questions and have those questions answered. If you have questions about this study, please contact Rose Spikes at 912-303-6440 with any questions. For questions concerning your rights as a research participant, contact Georgia Southern University Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs at 912-681-0843.
9. Compensation: There is no compensation for participation in this study.
10. Voluntary Participation: You do not have to participate in this research study. You may end your participation at any time by telling the researcher. You decide to stop working on the project at any time.
11. Penalty: There is no penalty for deciding not to participate in this study. Your child may decide at any time to not participate any further and may simply withdraw without penalty.
12. HIPAA: If the research falls under the HIPAA regulations, please go to the following site where additional information can be located on wording that will need to be included in the informed consent form: (site under development at this time.) **PLEASE NOTE: If your research project does not fall under the HIPAA regulations, please delete this statement (12).**
13. You must be 18 years of age or older to consent to participate in this research study. If you consent to participate in this research study and to the terms above, please sign your name and indicate the date below OR,



- a. I am asking your permission for your child to participate in this study, and will provide him/her with a simplified “assent” letter/verbal description before enrolling them in this study
- b. Provide assent letter or written documentation of the verbal briefing you will give the child (if he/she is too young to read)

You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep for your records.

Title of Project: Performing Ethnographic Inquiry into America’s Black Youth Culture: The Impact of Hip Hop and Rap Music on Today’s Youth Society

Principal Investigator: Rose C. Spikes, Vice Principal 2120 McLeod Avenue Savannah, GA 31405,  
(912)961-3353 rose.spikes@savannah.chatham.k12.ga.us

Faculty Advisor: Dr. John A. Weaver, P.O. Box 08144 Statesboro, GA 30460,  
(912) 871-1709 jweaver@georgiasouthern.edu

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Participant Signature

Date

I, the undersigned, verify that the above informed consent procedure has been followed.

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Investigator Signature

Date

APPENDIX B  
PARENTAL INFORMED CONSENT

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

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DEPARTMENT OF CURRICULUM, FOUNDATIONS & READING

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***PARENTAL INFORMED CONSENT***

Dear Parent or Guardian:

A study will be conducted at your child's school in the next few weeks. Its purpose is to determine how hip hop culture can be incorporated into the curriculum to promote academic achievement. In particular, we will be asking how hip hop has influenced their language, identity and dress. We will also see the relationship between hip hop can be used to meet the academic needs of African American male students.

If you give permission, your child will have the opportunity to participate in reading and math skill exercises using different forms of hip hop culture. Your child will also be monitored for the level of confidence exhibited before each activity. At the end of the session, each child will be videotaped using the hip hop culture using positive images. This study will take approximately 30 -45 minutes for your child to participate.

Your child's participation in this study is completely voluntary. The risks from participating in this study are no more than would be encountered in everyday life; however, your child will be told that he or she may stop participating at any time without any penalty. Your child may choose to not answer any question(s) he/she does not wish to for any reason. Your child may refuse to participate even if you agree to her/his participation.

In order to protect the confidentiality of the child, a number and not the child's name will appear on all of the information recorded during the experiment. All information pertaining to the study will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in an office at Georgia Southern University. No one at your child's school will see the information recorded about your child.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study at any time, please feel free to contact Rose Spikes, Vice Principal, at 912-303-6440.

If you are giving permission for your child to participate in the experiment, please sign the form below and return it to your child's teacher as soon as possible. Thank you very much for your time.

Rose C. Spikes

Vice Principal

Investigator's Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Child's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent or Guardian's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX C  
MINOR'S ASSENT

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

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DEPARTMENT OF CURRICULUM, FOUNDATIONS & READING

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*MINOR'S ASSENT*

Hello,

I am Rose C. Spikes a graduate student at Georgia Southern University and I am conducting a study on Performing Ethnographic Inquiry into America's Black Youth Culture: The Impact of Hip Hop and Rap Music on Today's Youth Society.

You are being asked to participate in a project that will be used to learn more about the positive aspects of hip hop culture. If you agree to be part of the project, you will be participating in an interview on hip hop culture. I will also ask you questions about how you are feeling before I begin the project. After we have finished the interview, you will have an opportunity to talk to about your answers. It will take 30 minutes for you to do this project.

You do not have to do this project. You can stop whenever you want. If you do not want to participate in any of the activities, it is ok, and you can go back to your classroom, and nothing bad will happen. You can refuse to do the project even if your parents have said you can.

None of the teachers or other people at your school will see the answers to the questions that I ask you. All of the answers that you give me will be kept in a locked cabinet in a room at Georgia Southern University, and only I or my advisor will see your answers. We are not going to put your name on the answers that you give us, so no one will be able to know which answers were yours.

If you or your parent/guardian has any questions about this form or the project, please call me at 303-6440 or my advisor, Dr. John Weaver, at 912-871-1709. Thank you!

If you understand the information above and want to do the project, please sign your name on the line below:

**Yes, I will participate in this project:** \_\_\_\_\_

Child's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Investigator's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX D  
PRINCIPAL'S LETTER



Hesse Elementary School  
9116 Whitfield Ave.  
Savannah, GA 31406



October 29, 2008

To Whom It May Concern:

I am aware that Rose Spikes, Assistant Principal of Hesse Elementary, will be conducting a survey on the topic of popular culture (e.g. Hip Hop and Rap) with the middle school students at Hesse Elementary School. I am aware that she is using this data for a research project to obtain her Doctoral of Education from Georgia Southern. She will be presenting the results to me upon completion of her research.

Sincerely,

Lawrence E. Butler, Jr.

Principal

APPENDIX E  
FRACTION RAP

**Fraction Rap**

**Dividin' fraction, easy as pie:**

**Flip the second and multiply!**

**Multiplyin' fractions-no big problem:**

**Top times top over bottom times bottom!**

**When addin' fractions that you see,**

**Match the bottoms perfectly!**

PDF created with pdfFactory trial version [www.pdffactory.com](http://www.pdffactory.com)

## APPENDIX F

### HIP HOP AND RAP VOCABULARY QUIZ

**1. If you have a cool whip, what do you actually have?**

- ☐ A whipped cream alternative
- ☐ A cool handshake
- ☐ A cool walk
- ☐ A cool car

**2. What's a homie?**

- ☐ DJ
- ☐ Classmate
- ☐ Good friend
- ☐ Neighbor

**3. To battle means to?**

- ☐ Have a rap off
- ☐ Have a dance off
- ☐ Make a mistake while rapping
- ☐ A and B

**4. What does DJ stand for?**

- ☐ Dance Jam
- ☐ Double Jump
- ☐ Disc Jockey
- ☐ Divine Joker

**5. If you are a B-boy or B-girl, that means you know how to do what?**

- ☐ Dress well
- ☐ Breakdance
- ☐ Freestyle
- ☐ Create hip murals

**6. If your homie tells you "Let's squash this beef," what are they saying to you?**

- ☐ We should get something to eat



- Get our on the dance floor
- Food fight
- Let's put an end to this argument

**7. To chill means to...**

- Freeze
- Hang out
- Write rap lyrics
- Sleep

**8. If someone fronts on you, what are they doing?**

- Copying your style
- Smiling
- Pretending to be something they aren't
- They've got their eye on you

**9. What is bling bling?**

- Flashy jewelry
- Money
- A cool rhyme
- A fancy house

**10. A boo is...**

- A girlfriend/boyfriend
- A good scare
- A microphone
- A baseball cap

**11. If you live in the dirty, where do you live?**

- The West coast
- The East coast
- The Midwest
- The South

## APPENDIX G

## RAPPER'S DELIGHT

**Rapper's Delight (excerpt)**

i        said        a        hip        hop        the        hippie        the        hippie  
to        the        hip        hip        hop,        a        you        dont        stop  
the    rock    it    to    the    bang    bang    boogie    say    up    jumped    the    boogie  
to        the        rhythm        of        the        boogie,        the        beat

now    what    you    hear    is    not    a    test--i'm    rappin    to    the    beat  
and    me,    the    groove,    and    my    friends    are    gonna    try    to    move    your    feet  
see    i        am        wonder        mike        and        i        like        to        say        hello  
to    the    black,    to    the    white,    the    red,    and    the    brown,    the    purple    and    yellow  
but    first    i        gotta        bang        bang        the        boogie        to        the        boogie  
say    up    jump    the    boogie    to    the    bang    bang    boogie  
let's rock, you dont stop

## APPENDIX H

## HOMEWORK! OH HOMEWORK! AND SICK POEMS

**Homework! Oh Homework!**

Homework! Oh homework!

I hate you! You stink!

I wish I could wash your

Away in the sink,

If only a bomb

Would explode you to bits

Homework! Oh homework!

You're giving me fits.

I'd rather take baths

With a man-eating shark,

Or wrestle a lion

Alone in the dark,

Eat spinach and liver

Pet ten porcupines,

Than tackle the homework

My teacher assigns.

Homework! Oh, homework!

You're last on my list,

I simply can't see

Why you even exist

If you just disappeared

It would tickle me pink,

Homework! Oh, homework!

I hate you! You stink!

-Jack Prelutskey

Sick

“I cannot go to school today,”

Said little PeggyAnn McKay.

“I have the measles and the mumps,

A gash, a rash and purple bumps.

My mouth is wet, my throat is dry,

I’m going blind in my right eye.

My tonsils are as big as rocks,

I’ve counted sixteen chicken pox

And there’s one more—that’s seventeen,

And don’t you think my face looks green?

My leg is cut, my eyes are blue---

It might be instamatic flu.

I cough and sneeze and gasp and choke,

I’m sure that my left leg is broke—

My hip hurts when I move my chin,

My belly button’s caving in,

My back is wrenched, my ankle’s sprained,

My ‘pendix pains each time it rains.

My nose is cold, my toes are numb,

I have a sliver in my thumb.

My neck is stiff, my voice is weak,

I hardly whisper when I speak.

My tongue is filling up my mouth,

I think my hair is falling out.

My elbow’s bent, my spine ain’t straight,

My temperature is one-o-eight.

My brain is shrunk, I cannot hear.

There is a hole inside my ear.

I have a hangnail, and my heart is—what?

What's that! What's that you say?

You say today is...Saturday?

G'bye, I'm going out to play!"

--Shel Silverstein

## APPENDIX I

### SAMPLE MARKETING SURVEY

#### Sample Marketing Survey

What is your age?

- ☐ 17 or under
- ☐ 18-24
- ☐ 25-34
- ☐ 35-44
- ☐ 45-54
- ☐ 55 or above

What is your highest level of education?

- ☐ High school
- ☐ Associate's
- ☐ Bachelor's
- ☐ Master's
- ☐ Ph.D
- ☐ Other

How often do you shop for tennis shoes?

- ☐ Once a month
- ☐ Every other month
- ☐ Every three months

- ☐ Every four months
- ☐ Every five months
- ☐ Every six month
- ☐ Once a year

What a brands do you normally buy?

- ☐ Nike
- ☐ Adidas
- ☐ Lugz
- ☐ New Balance
- ☐ Reebok
- ☐ K Swiss
- ☐ Asics
- ☐ Other

How likely would you be to purchase this same tennis shoe again?

- ☐ Definitely
- ☐ Probably
- ☐ Probably not
- ☐ Definitely not

If your response is “probably not” or “definitely not”, please explain:

---

---

---

Why do you buy tennis shoes?

- Work
- Leisure
- Sports
- Other

What media outlet do you utilize to the most?

- Radio
- Newspaper
- Internet
- Television
- Magazine

Who is your favorite Hip-Hop artist?

---

Who is your favorite athlete?

---

Do you have any comments that you would like to share?

---

---

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## APPENDIX J

### PARENT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Music is Magical

Interview an adult(parent, grandparent, aunt or uncle). Have fun talking with someone in your family. Have them to share their time as a teenager.

Did you enjoy listening to music as a teenager?

If yes, what type of music did you listen to when you were a teenager?

Who were your favorite singer and/or group ? Why?

Did you ever listen to 8 tracks? Albums? Cassettes? Compact Discs (CDs)?

How much did it cost for an album when you were a teenager?

Did your parents like your music?

Do you think music influenced your life positively? How so?

Tell anything you want to share about your musical interest and background (e.g. Do you sing? Do you play an instrument? etc.)

Baby face

1970 1971 1975 1978 1979 1982 1984 1987 1991 1996 1999

1970 Air Jive  
Bombing  
Bomber  
Dr  
Hip  
Hyp  
Shen  
Dj  
to  
Dj

1971 Great 99  
Grid  
Dreem  
begin

1975 friend  
Dj  
to  
Screen  
Dj  
Grid  
broad  
Theorise  
I  
on  
the  
99  
13

1978 Music  
Judy  
and  
them  
top  
music  
Hyp  
Hops  
first  
first  
commercially  
reduced  
style  
Hyp  
Hap

1979 Rap  
Defiant  
rebased  
Hyp  
Hops  
first  
first  
commercially  
reduced  
style  
Hyp  
Hap

1982 Rap  
Dreem  
The  
Hyp  
Hops  
first  
first  
commercially  
reduced  
style  
Hyp  
Hap

1984 Rap  
Dreem  
The  
Hyp  
Hops  
first  
first  
commercially  
reduced  
style  
Hyp  
Hap

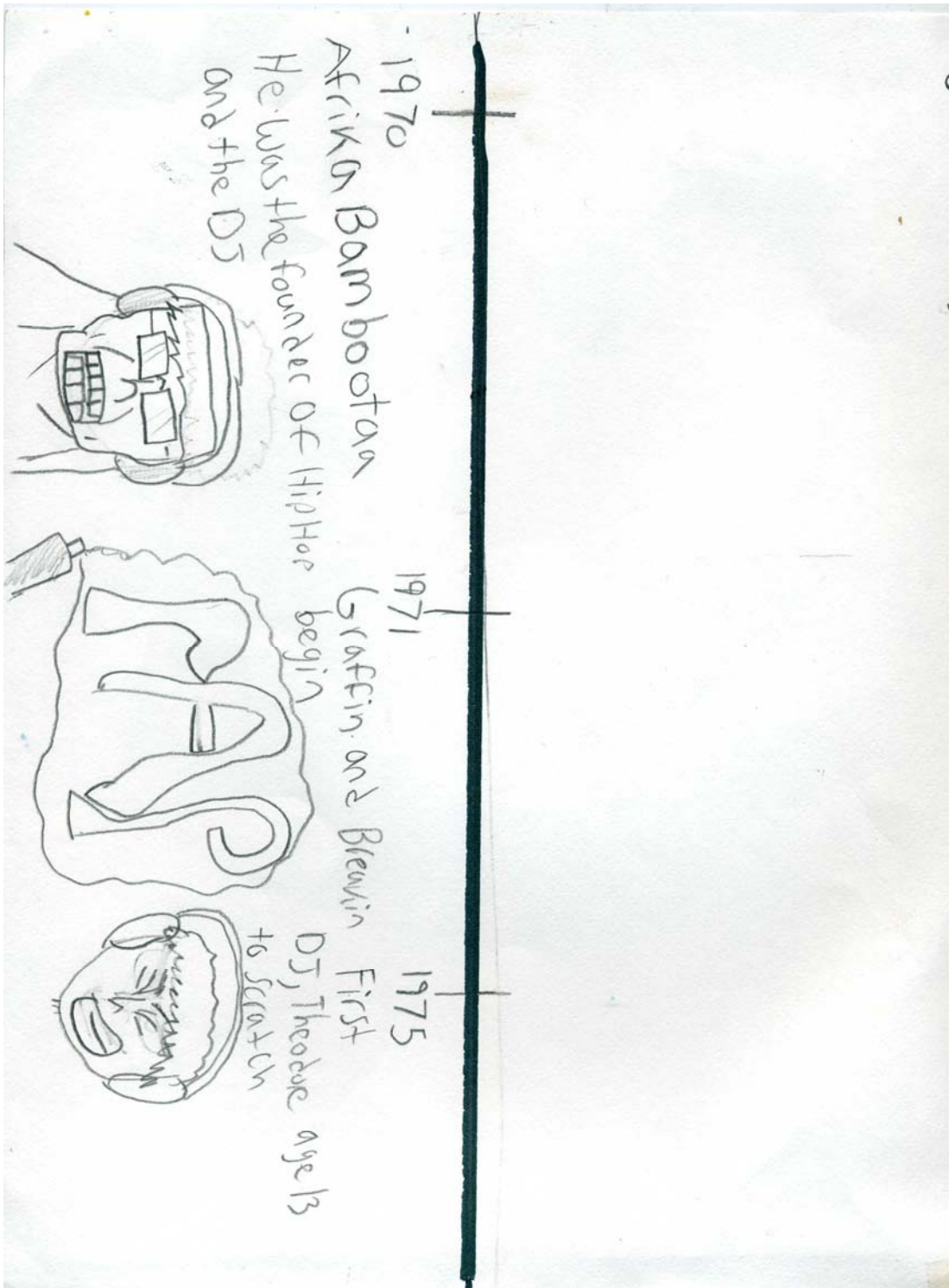
1987 Rap  
Dreem  
The  
Hyp  
Hops  
first  
first  
commercially  
reduced  
style  
Hyp  
Hap

1991 Rap  
Dreem  
The  
Hyp  
Hops  
first  
first  
commercially  
reduced  
style  
Hyp  
Hap

1996 Rap  
Dreem  
The  
Hyp  
Hops  
first  
first  
commercially  
reduced  
style  
Hyp  
Hap

1999 Rap  
Dreem  
The  
Hyp  
Hops  
first  
first  
commercially  
reduced  
style  
Hyp  
Hap





Afrika Bambaataa



Bambaataa (left) with DJ Yutaka (right) in 2004.

1970

Founder of  
HIP HOP, Afrika  
Bambaataa,  
starts + DJ

1971



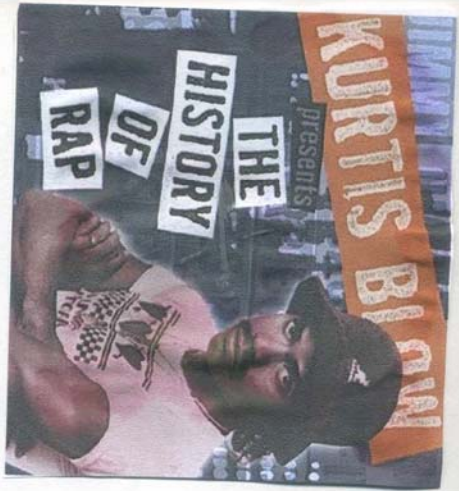
Graffiti and  
breakin' begin.



1978

Music industry coins  
the term "rap music"





1979

Kurtis Blow  
becomes the first  
rapper to sign  
with a major  
label.

1983

Ice T becomes  
one of first  
West Coast  
rapper

1984



Russell Simmons  
forms Def Jam  
Record



1987

Public Enemy  
releases their  
first album.

1990

Tupac becomes  
a HIP HOP dancer

1991

NWA record  
becomes the  
first gangsta  
rap CD.